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Lifecycle 2 Vol2 #6 06/00

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# NextGen

Next Generation Magazine

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- What Sony doesn't want you to know about PS2
- The straight talk from Japan
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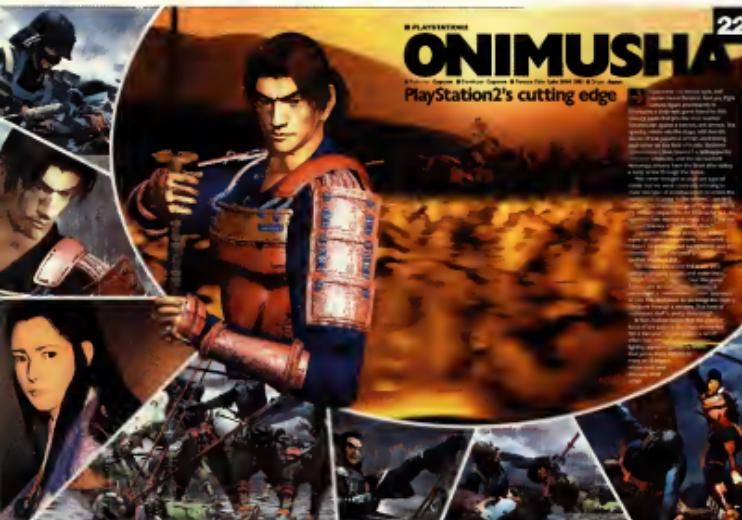


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# → Next Gen

Next Generation Magazine



## ONIMUSHĀ

PlayStation2's cutting edge



## READY FOR WAR?

Are the consoles ready for war?

### → News

The games industry is changing so fast, only crack reporters like us can keep up with it

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Console war 2000. The next year will bristle with the fiercest competition this industry has ever seen. Are the combatants ready?....81

# 06/00



## ■ EDITORIAL E3 Answers



The yearly E3 tradeshow is a rat race. Everyone there is trying to get somewhere they're not, or find someplace they will never need to go again. (Ever been to Sub-orbital meeting room 9003-G, Pluto Hall?) Still, the chaos is inspiring. Last year, E3 drew some \$5,000 headless chickens, each of whom contributed in some way to the \$6.5 billion in software sales for 1999. Lightning would be hard pressed to keep up with all the new technology, content, marketing, and sales that are churned and burned every year in what the uninformed call "a kids market."

This month, we bring you up-to-the-minute analysis on a console war that's outgrowing its infancy. This, just as E3, our yearly industry barometer, opens May 11. Last year, a 20-minute E3 tour was all you needed to see that Dreamcast would launch successfully. PlayStation would offer more of the same, and *Perfect Dark* would be delayed. This year, we're hoping for more from Microsoft, Sega, and (doubtfully) Nintendo. And Sony will finally pop the PS2 cork on the bottled-up U.S. launch. If we're not covered in a champagne of new PS2 titles, launch details, online plans, and pricing strategies...we'll beat down doors until we get some. Next issue, look for a full E3 show report. I guarantee there will be more answers than questions.

A large, handwritten signature of the author, Tom Russo, in a cursive script. The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Tom Russo



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Now including PlayStation!

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It's not the end of the world, just the end of another fine issue

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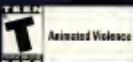
"Virtual On: Oratoria Tangram is one of the most visually impressive Dreamcast titles yet."

— Next Generation



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# →News

Game industry news and analysis

■ LithTech's Jason Hall (left) and Dr. Greg Whitten, and one of Whitten's prized classic racing vehicles, a 1957 Aston Martin

START ME UP

# Who's



**LithTech is now a separate company. The top priority is the licensees."**

— Jason Hall, LithTech

Photo by Bill Cannon



Do Hollywood directors build their own cameras every time they shoot a new film? Certainly not. But that's exactly what happens in game development: A developer builds a new engine to coincide with a new game project. The camera metaphor has become the quick and easy way for the development community to describe the biggest problem facing smaller game

equivalent of the latest and greatest cameras. While some developers have begun to offer partial technology solutions (so-called "middleware"), these companies develop and license full game engines, veritable code fountains to build a new game upon. Traditionally, the three have licensed their respective technology only to PC developers. This year, however, each of their engines will be used in

But certainly it has to be lucrative for the company! Sure, but when you're Id, "lucrative" is a relative term. "Compared to the money we make from our products," Carmack says, "it's about 25 percent of our income, if that. And it's only 25 percent because Half-Life's been such a runaway success."

Without Half-Life royalties, Carmack believes licensing would account for about 10% of the company's income,

so everyone has equal footing.\*

Of course, you can't develop an engine without a game to try it out on, and as you might expect, the Monolith titles in development will provide the test bed for future versions of the LithTech engine. Currently, LithTech is using Monolith's *No One Lives Forever* to build out the PS2 engine.

Hall is well aware that developers

# driving next-generation game technology?

Licensed game engines aren't just for PCs anymore. Id, Epic, and LithTech are all supporting the next wave of consoles. Can any one of them save the development community?

**I**"Licensing has always been something that we do because people pester us."

— John Carmack, id software

developers today. Game programming is only getting harder, and teams are struggling to keep up with a technology curve that's trending toward a 90-degree angle. At the same time, game content continues to evolve, requiring more story, character, audio, and overall artistic development. Many smaller houses just do not have the financial resources to reinvent the technology wheel every time they start a new 16- to 20-month project, and with a new round of high-end consoles, the problem is only getting worse.

## All cylinders firing

At first, the idea of every game being built from the same codebase sounds ridiculous. But the engine forms the roots from which the game begins to develop. To use the movie metaphor again, *Die Hard* and *Driving Miss Daisy* are both films, but are they the same because they were shot on the same cameras?

LithTech, id (creator of the Quake engine), and Epic (creator of the Unreal engine) are in a position to offer developers the software

PlayStation2 development. Perhaps the most famous of all licensed engines is id's Quake engine. Electronic Arts has personally taken the task of porting the Quake III engine to PlayStation2 for its upcoming Bond title, *The World Is Not Enough*. Why port the Quake II engine when Epic and LithTech are building versions of their engines specifically for PS2? The answer is simple: because EA wanted it (and because the company chose the Quake III engine to drive the PC version of the game).

"Licensing has always been something that we do because people pester us," says John Carmack, id software founder and industry programming guru. "It's not something we go out and pitch to people, because I'm not interested in doing that kind of support stuff. I'm interested in doing a good job for what we target, what our focus is. And it does turn out as useful to other people, and there are a number of people who are licensing it, and it's been gratifying to see some success with licensed products."

and his primary focus remains on id's games. "The pattern at id has worked out well," he says. "Our new technology is released in concert with a game that's going to be a big success, and then other people can use the technology later."

Still, there's only one Carmack, and many developers find using id's code without any support a challenge they don't want. That's where LithTech comes in. In January of this year, LithTech Inc. became a subsidiary of Monolith, acting as company that focused specifically on engine development — and support. "When [a developer] signs that contract," says LithTech CEO Jason Hall, "we set up this room with a bunch of computers and have a teacher come in, and we teach them everything over a two-day period — it's not that difficult to get. Once they've taught, they're all happy."

Should the developer have a problem, Hall says they can call or e-mail dedicated support people. "There've been times," he says, "when we have flown someone down to just sit with them and figure out the problem." But will Monolith get access to secret engine features? Hall says no. "LithTech is now a separate company," Hall says. "The top priority is the licensees. Monolith will be treated as a licensee,

looking to license technology have been wowed with the success id and Epic have achieved with their engines, but he says that's not necessarily going to translate into great game sales for them. "The engine doesn't make the game; you're going to make the game," Hall says. "We believe technical features are not as likely to sell a game product as good content. So the weighting on our development is always toward bringing the cost of development down and making it easier to add content, as opposed to adding a new technical feature at the cost of making it more complicated to get in."

**T**hat doesn't mean LithTech isn't thinking about the evolution in software. On the contrary, five years from now, Hall expects the industry to deliver *Toy Story*-quality graphics in real-time, and because he estimates that 300 people worked on that movie, writing an engine of that quality from scratch will be ridiculously expensive. ("Two or three developers might be able to get a budget like that to even try," Hall says.) But by that time, he estimates LithTech will have spent \$30 million developing



## SPY vs SPY

the company's technology, which can be licensed for a flat fee of \$250,000. When the PlayStation 2 engine is finished this fall, it will be licensed for a flat cost of \$500,000.

**Who's buying?** There are a number of announced PC licensees, including Interplay, Ripcord, and the brand new Full-On Amusement, a new developer mainly made up of former Blizzard employees fresh off of *Diablo II*. And Irrational Games (*System Shock 2*) has announced its intention to use LithTech PS2 for an upcoming project for Crave Entertainment. And while the engine is still in early stages, it already shows some highly sophisticated terrain and advanced geometry.

**LithTech may have found its secret weapon** in Dr. Greg Whitten. After earning his PhD at Harvard, Whitten joined Microsoft when there were less than 20 people working for Bill Gates and Paul Allen. He retired as a multi-billionaire in 1998. In his 19-year tenure with Microsoft, Whitten developed numerous compiler technologies and company-wide object-oriented software strategies. His experience and research in the development of large-scale, concurrent object-oriented systems makes him a natural fit for overseeing the evolution of LithTech Online, the company's massively multiplayer extension of the LithTech engine. The company expects to invest \$15 million in developing technology that will enable developers to use a standardized toolkit in the creation of online games hosting thousands of simultaneous users.

Who's up first for this brave, new online system? Fox Interactive has announced plans to develop a title based on one of its major properties, which sources outside the company lead us to believe features the *Alien vs. Predator* franchise.

### Unreal performance

What about Epic? The Unreal developer's strategy falls somewhere between id's and LithTech's. Unlike id, Epic isn't indifferent to licensing (both Epic and LithTech have been active at Sony's recent PlayStation 2 Developer Conferences), but "we're not a high volume shop," says Epic's vice president Mark Reign. "We're not looking to work with everybody; we want to work with a couple of the best guys. This year, for instance, there are *Duke Nukem Forever* and *Deus Ex*."

Reign, who is hesitant to say how many Unreal engine licensees there are, feels that his 18-person shop need not expand nor burden itself supporting teams that require lots of help.

### LithTech PS2

#### ■ No One Lives Forever



To test their PS2 engine, LithTech developers Matthew Scott and Terry Frangulisakis have begun implementing models and levels from Monolith's PC title, *No One Lives Forever*. The engine will be finished this September, and the terrain and architecture are coming along nicely.



### Quake III Engine PS2

#### ■ The World Is Not Enough



With some months of development still ahead, Electronic Arts has done some fantastic work bringing the Quake III engine to PS2 for *The World Is Not Enough*. The Bond character models and levels are remarkably anti-aliased, and we like the way this control room (below) looks up.



### "Our next game, which we are not ready to announce yet, will be designed for consoles."

— Mark Reign, Epic

"Support is a small percentage of our time," he says. "Everybody in our company gets a piece of the action, in terms of licensing revenue. So the entire development team has an incentive to make sure licensees are happy, well-supported, and questions are getting answered, and those great licensees come back again." Two months before E3, the company already has an early unoptimized version of *Unreal Tournament* running solely off PS2 CPU. The single-player game features two opposing bots.

"You know we're going to do *Unreal Tournament* for PlayStation 2," Reign says. And then he follows this statement up with something that will really shake the boots of some PC loyalists: "Our next game, which we are not ready to announce yet, will be designed for consoles. It will be a console game from the beginning. It will also be on the PC, but our goal is to definitely embrace consoles."

**Reign brings Next Generation over** to a demo computer and loads up

some impressive large-scale terrain generators and a new skeletal animation system. Lush, rolling hillsides, with fully articulated trees, stretch into the distance, above which sits a castle designed with rounded archways and cathedral windows. In another demo, a high-poly model moves around, subtly displaying realistic idle animations.

"Everything we're doing now is being designed for all the platforms," he says. "Now we're really developing a hardware renderer so we can do a lot of new things in a lot more detail than we were previously able to do."

So whatever happened to the much-rumored Dreamcast version of *Unreal Tournament* that we've been expecting since launch? Reign says it's still likely. "We're in talks right now with a third party to do a Dreamcast version," he says, "but it's not something we'll be doing internally."

### Fuel for the future

Of course, both LithTech and Epic are looking into X-Box, and you don't

need to understand how a BSP-tree works to know that both companies will inevitably have their engines up and running on it. (We expect EA or Activision to port *Quake III*, or whatever comes next from id.) And, for the record, there are even more engine developers on the horizon. Utah-based Saffire has a multi-platform engine in the works (see *Dolphin Watch*, page 14), and Alias Wavefront also has a Maya Real Time software development kit in the works. This is good news. Competition aside, there are a number of developers out there working hard to make game development a faster, more cost-effective process. This brings the focus of the game developer back to better game design, which is where it should always be in the first place.

**So why this story now?** We confess — we timed this story to appear in the issue that **Next Generation** brings to E3. Why? Because among all the product announcements, launch dates, price wars, and hardware talk, we'll be bombarded with, it is this untalked-about but crucial piece of news — real solutions by game developers for the game development community — that the editors of this magazine are most thankful for.

— Tom Russo

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Right now it's just a tech demo, but the gaming applications are endless

MORE CONTROL, LESS CONTROLLER

## Gesture Recognition Technology — it's on the horizon

Careful, your game system may recognize that middle finger

According to Digital Tech Frontier's Scott Jochim, "In the very near future, technology will be used not as a device, but as a natural interface to the

human body."

To this end, DTF has created a Gesture Recognition Interface (GRI) that tracks the user's hand and body movements in 3D space, rendering the mouse and keyboard virtually obsolete.

The technology also sports the capability to insert the user directly into the virtual environment. The benefits for gaming are obvious — imagine a realistic sword fight in which the player is actually inserted into a medieval castle, and must thrust and parry in realtime in order to survive. While this sounds similar to the fighting games that have surfaced in various location-based entertainment venues, Jochim points out that previous iterations of the technology have all used either motion-capture equipment or blue screens, whereas DTF's technology



Although Digital Tech Frontier currently constructs custom enclosures for its attractions, the company is certain the technology can be adapted for the home

uses only video cameras and requires no wires, special gloves, or unique surroundings. The system is still a bit finicky about lighting requirements (the same weakness displayed by a similar camera system Sony's Phil Harrison demonstrated this spring at GDC), but Jochim is confident that the technology can be perfected and brought into the home in a cost-effective manner.

Before we see this technology in games, it will likely be applied to practical applications, such as enabling the

## SATURN'S FINAL FIGHT

Not even Sega held on to the Saturn as long as Capcom has, but the company is still keeping the faith. Or was until recently, anyway. The final Sega Saturn game has been released, in the form of the poetically titled Final Fight Revenge. A sequel to the semi-final Final Fight 2D beat-'em-ups, the title resurrects Guy, Cody, and Hagar and drops them into 3D. Street Fighter EX-style fighting action is back, and U.S. consumers dried up some time ago, but Saturn fans with a mod chip should be able to obtain the game from their usual import game suppliers. (FYI: the game is pretty horrid.)



physically disabled to operate electric doors, flip light switches, or even write a letter, just by looking at the correct icons on the computer screen.

Still, for those of us fortunate enough to be physically able, we hope designers remember how unathletic many gamers tend to be. If they don't, when the technology becomes a reality in the home, Nintendo may be handing out a lot more than those gloves it recently dispensed to gamers with calloused palms from excessive "Mario Partying."

— Eric Bratcher

## DREAMCAST MAKES BLOCKBUSTER

Ever the trendsetter, Blockbuster Video has decided to openly embrace Sega's new game console, dubbed the Dreamcast, by offering the console and approximately 45 software titles for rent in Blockbuster stores nationwide. While this can only be considered a wise move for the video chain, and good news for gamers, we at NG News felt it had to have a word with the Blockbuster employees who promised us early last September that they would begin carrying the systems "about two weeks."



## BITS FROM THE EDGE

# News Bytes

As the industry got ready for the first Electronic

Entertainment Expo of the New Millennium™, the annual spring mating rituals of game companies began. You see, spring is a time for companies to announce that they've lost a lot of money in the past 12 months (and blame it on John Romano), to follow this up with announcements of amazing product lines that will never ship, and to cap it off by saying that they're merging with other less successful companies, or that they're getting bought by a giant media conglomerate

that haven't published games since movies of Tia Carrere on a CD qualified as "multimedia entertainment" titles. To wit:

**Fear Bernie Stolar:** Just after arriving at Mattel Interactive, Stolar started clearing house. Mattel announced that the incredibly expensive The Learning Company, which it bought for several billion dollars, has quarterly losses in excess of \$100 million. So Mattel is selling it, and posting it as a discontinued business on its books starting second-quarter 2000. Mattel has already laid off more than 500 people in the process, and more "redundancies" are

expected. It's about as ignominious as failures get, but TLC can look on the bright side: it'll always have *Myst*.

**Eidos announced disappointing financials in March, resulting in a 51 percent drop in its stock value.** The company in part blamed its poor results on the perpetually absent *Dokotan*, but primarily cited shrinking PlayStation sales. The consumer, according to the folks at Lara Croft, is waiting for PS2 and isn't interested in last-gen games, even ones that feature the enormous breasts of Lara Croft. In fact, Eidos execs are

adamant that gamers' love affair with Lara is not over; with one company officer citing Nintendo's "fat little plumber guy" and his years of success as proof that Tomb Raider is forever. So, because it's impossible that gamers are sick of Raider games, it's self-evident that the PlayStation market has simply evaporated.

**On the same day that Eidos' stock took a beating, Square announced that it needed to up its forecasted profits for 1999 by a factor of eight.** The company thought it would make a net profit of one-hundred million yen due to

E3 SPOILER OR INDUSTRY RUMOR?

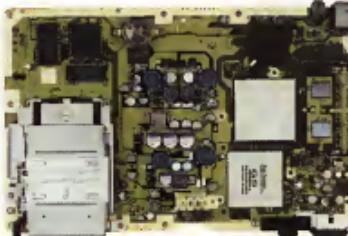
# Built-in hard drive and modem for US PlayStation2?

Sony's system may be online sooner than you think

A Bloomberg report on Friday, April 14, caused some concern in the console industry. The news agency claimed that a Sony employee had confirmed that a hard drive and modem would appear in PlayStation2 at the U.S. launch of the system. The device, or devices, was previously scheduled to arrive in late 2001. A call to Sony met with the now familiar, "we can't comment on that."

Yet Sony has a history of completely denying stories that it knew to be untrue, and this story certainly seems to hold some credence — but it is frustratingly short of details. Nobody seems to know whether or not the modem and hard drive will be contained within a single, separate device, or if Sony plans to build both features into the U.S. PlayStation2. The Bloomberg report certainly indicated the latter, stating, "By including the additional hardware in the U.S. version of the console, Sony is responding to competition from Microsoft Corp."

That certainly seems to be the case. Microsoft's VP of game publishing, Ed Fries, responded to the news, saying, "It's a rumor at the moment, and it's hard to react to every rumor. I was one of the champions of including a hard drive in the X-Box, so if it turns out to be true, then it really validates what we believed from the beginning and one of the things we fought hard for. Having an intermediate step between the slow access times of DVD and the fast nature of RAM and processor is important."



We've taken apart Japan's PS2, and looking at the motherboard, we don't see much room for an internal hard drive or modem.

If PlayStation2 does indeed ship with a modem and hard drive built-in, this would add a significant amount to the manufacturing cost. Retailers we spoke to certainly had not been alerted to a change in price strategy, and as we write this, it still appears that U.S. PlayStation2 will cost in the neighborhood of \$299 and be released, as planned, this fall.

— Frank O'Connor



## HARDCORE

As a former police officer, motivation was extremely helpful in my getting through the endless hassles of the job, like the unexpected last minute call at the end of the shift. I dreaded the dispatcher's voice over the radio at 10:54 PM, "Bingo 3, copy, an assignment." I remember one in-progress theft report at a convalescent home involving a nurse suspected of stealing the purse of another nurse. Such a call would most likely lead to an on-the-spot arrest, fingerprinting, and endlessly awaiting bond money at the station... hours of unexpected work at the end of my shift! I remember standing in the nurses' lounge interviewing the suspect, maneuvering my questions toward a confession. As I was talking, I glanced at a glossy Sunday ad crumpled next to a nearby pay phone advertising a big sale on a brand new PlayStation fighting game. All I could think about was grabbing the ad and hustling off to the store first thing in the morning to buy my copy before it sold out. It was just the motivation to add a needed boost! I got her to confess, flew through the fingerprinting, and got out of the station much quicker than I ever dreamed. I bought the game the next morning and had time to play before my shift started.

Sean Shimmin, [shimmon@prodigy.net](mailto:shimmon@prodigy.net)

Final Fantasy VIII sales, but much to its surprise, its profits were more in the range of eight-hundred million yen. This was due primarily to 6.19 million unit sales of FF VIII worldwide — and that's not counting the PC units; that's just in the rapidly shrinking, Lara Croft-loving PlayStation market.

**And what do you get when you combine desperation and fear?** We're not sure here at News Bytes, but if anyone can teach us that, it's probably the folks at the newly merged 3Dfx and GigaPixel. Fresh from getting stripped of the design win on the X-Box graphics chip (NVIDIA stole it in the lith

hour), graphics technology company GigaPixel announced a buyout by 3Dfx, which pulled 3Dfx out of an all-time stock low. The companies also announced that together they would develop display communication technologies outside of the games market for a wide array of platforms. Will Wall Street finally bite 3Dfx as a company worth watching again? It hasn't in quite some time.

**Id CEO Todd Hollenshead announced to the game world in early April that the Paduchan case was dismissed on all counts by the**

**Judge for the case.** News Bytes readers may remember that last year before the Columbine massacre, the parents of children killed in a similar Rudac, KY school shooting filed suit against almost every videogame maker in the country for essentially noticing the assistant to get a gun and shoot his classmates. The case was dismissed on the eve of the release of a New York Times report focusing on 100-narrative killings during the last 50 years. The report found that only seven of the killers studied had ever even played a videogame, and only nine seemed to have an interest in violent movies. The only common

threads for such killers, as found by the Times report, were mental illness, and a lack of desire to flee the crime.

**And in less serious news, we announced that Dokketano would be on store shelves last month — an obvious joke.** As everyone knows, Dokketano will not be released until the seventh seal is broken, the oceans run red with blood, the skies are blazed out by darkness, and the four horsemen ride among us.

— Compiled by Aaron John Leib, Executive Producer, DailyRadar.com

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# SUPERmagnetic *neo*

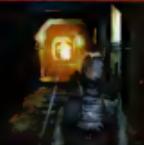
THE ATTRACTION BEGINS JULY 2000.

06/00

→ Nintendo has gone mute. Opening its mouth barely long enough to announce a Dolphin delay to next year in the U.S., the company has once again zipped up, refusing to reveal any new information about the future console. The dreaded slow period, when Nintendo enthusiasts can do nothing more than bite their nails nervously and hope for the best, has arrived. It's going to be a long wait before we hear anything concrete. Still, here's the latest from behind Mario's curtain:

## Where art thou Dolphin?

According to Nintendo, there will be no announcements about Dolphin at this year's Electronics Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles — no hardware shown, no software previewed, and no tech demos rolled out behind closed doors. While that might not be much of a surprise considering that NCL wants to unveil the system in full at Space World. In August, Next Generation has also learned that the same holds true for Game Boy Advance. Despite a recent Game Boy Advance Developers Conference, at which Nintendo briefed potential developers on the handheld (and then promptly leaked full details of the event to the press), NCL has allegedly shot down requests by Nintendo of America to demo GBA at E3.



■ Hoist to self: when a subway train blows up, don't be standing in the damn tunnel!



## Welcome to E3. There's nothing to see here, move along...



■ We'd like to think that these non-system-specific prototype screens (from a Rainbow Six demo Saffire put together for Red Storm) feature the superbly detailed characters, lighting, and special effects that we'll get on Dolphin.

## A new hardware hope

Still, Nintendo enthusiasts can take solace in the fact that some serious movement is happening behind the scenes. Next Generation has learned that the Dolphin system, unlike PlayStation 2, will feature on-hardware transformation and lighting (or T&L) and a unified memory system. The design is similar to nVidia's PC graphics card GeForce 256 in that instead of straining a system's main CPU, the T&L effects are all done through the graphics chipset. This frees up the main CPU — in this case, Dolphin's 400MHz Gekko processor — to handle other aspects of the game, such as intensive AI and physics.

## Ridge Racer without the ridges

Several trusted sources have confirmed that Namco Japan is in development on numerous titles for Nintendo's next-generation console. Specifically noted is a port of Ridge Racer V to Dolphin, slightly enhanced for the system's abilities. We expect more on this to be revealed at Space World.

## SAGE in action

Game maker Saffire has been grabbing headlines recently with its



SAGE game architecture, a backbone of sorts created to make game development easier and more timely. The software house recently showcased SAGE at the Game Developers Conference to impressed onlookers. Red Storm Entertainment is very interested in the architecture, and has, in fact, been petitioned by Saffire to make a "next-generation" game using it. We've nabbed screenshots of the prototype demo Saffire presented to Red Storm that was made on the SAGE architecture. Note, Red Storm was adamant that we make perfectly clear that the screens are taken from a prototype demo designed to showcase SAGE's next-generation engine, and while based on the Rainbow Six franchise, no such game is in development... yet. But we can certainly keep our fingers crossed.



## Prepare to be impressed

While Nintendo of America isn't allowed to say anything to us about Dolphin development for fear of being sent to bed without supper by NCL, the company has slipped a few hints here and there. In a recent interview, NDA's director of corporate affairs, Perrin Kaplan, spoke briefly about Shigeru Miyamoto's plans, saying, "Just as Mario was so groundbreaking for Nintendo 64, the same thing will happen with Dolphin."

Why does August seem so far away?

— Matt Cosomoshio  
Editor-in-Chief, IGN64.com

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■ TOM RUSSO'S

# In the Studio

Development news as it develops

**EUROPE'S PS2 TITLES REVEALED**

→ just moments before

we went to press, Sony Europe opened its robe and showed the world its PS2 lineup. Garnering the most "oohs" was the new

WipeOut Fusion, followed closely by the new London-based driving adventure entitled *The Getaway*, and a new *Dracon* title. We expect to have more information on these titles in upcoming issues.
**MOJO-A-NO-NO**

→ Just when you thought Mario Kart clones were drying up, someone at Rockstar had the bright idea for Austin Powers: Mojo Rolly for Dreamcast. We're sure there'll be some shag-a-delic humor as Austin, Mini-Me, De Evil, and the rest of his horny pals fail to behave in this comedic racing romp. But considering that the developer is UK-based Climax Group, the company responsible for the horrible PlayStation port of Son Francisco Rush, we're not expecting to be overwhelmed by Mojo when it ships later this year. We'll keep our fingers crossed and hope someone has learned something from the *South Park* Rolly debacle.


**DOLPHIN AFTER DARK?**

→ The latest rumor on the Web has it that Rare has officially started working on the Perfect Dark sequel for Nintendo's mysterious Dolphin system. Rare's publicist, Simon Farmer, has been quoted as saying, "Rare cannot confirm or deny that." Unlike the Bond property that was snatched away from it, Rare created and outright owns the Joanna Dark intellectual property, and because Nintendo is investing enormous sums on an expensive TV campaign to launch Perfect Dark this spring, we don't doubt in the least that a *Dolphin* sequel is being planned. As sure as Mario's been around since the early '90s, you can bet that Nintendo is the last company that would let its newest hero become a one-hit wonder on an aging system. Let's hope the next one doesn't take quite so long.


**SUCKERS FOR PS2**

→ Don't turn your back on Sucker Punch Productions. Formed by a group of ex-Microsoft employees, the Seattle-based developer created last year's *Rocket: Robot on Wheels* for Nintendo 64. While this remarkable first effort featured highly innovative design and earned critical acclaim, it unfortunately went head-to-head against *Donkey Kong Country* and was largely unnoticed by the gaming public. Don't expect that to happen again, though. The group has begun work on a PS2 game, and we're expecting even greater things from them.

**SONY TAKES AIM AT GOLDENEYE**

→ Think EA's Bond is the only shooter in development for PS2? Think again. Some time ago, several members of the *GoldenEye*-Perfect Dark team quietly left Rare, and set up another shop in the U.K. under the name Free Radical Design, at which they've begun work on a PlayStation2 title. Word from the U.K. has it that undisclosed Sony sources have said that the shooter the company is developing is second to nothing that's been shown on PS2 thus far — big words considering what's in the works at Square (such as *The Boxtector*) and what we're sure Konami has going on with *Metal Gear Solid 2*.



How many will you kill before they raise the white handkerchief of surrender?

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■ WHERE IS EVERYONE?

## Tokyo Game Show

Spring 2000 – not much to report



■ Capcom teased the crowd with a video of Onimusha, while Namco's booth featured Mr. Driller, a 2D, Tetris-meets-Boulderdash action-puzzle for Dreamcast.



### With Sony offering little for attendees to look at, Sega takes the show by default

Everybody was expecting a gorgeous Tokyo Game Show. Not only would there be tons of new PS2 titles, but also the hope was that more X-Box would be shown at Microsoft's booth. Unfortunately, none of that happened, leaving Sega as the high point of the show. So what did Sony Computer Entertainment (SCEI) have to offer? The only unreleased first-party PS2 game shown was *TV DJ*, (formerly known as Be on Edge) the odd Parappa-meets-James Bond game that was the surprise title at PlayStation Festival 2000. Sony's "no shows" included *Dark Cloud*, *Densetsu*, *Extermination*, and *GT 2000*. This is disappointing when you consider the long lineup SCEI revealed during the official PS2 announcement conference last year. It's likely that the company is keeping certain products under wraps until E3.

While Sony may have kept a low profile, Sega displayed a high-quality and diverse lineup, including

**Metropolis Street Racer** and **Jet Set Radio**, a unique rollerblade-and-graffiti game that was without a doubt the game of the show.

Sporting fantastic design and technology, it easily outclassed many of the PS2 titles. The only RPGs to make the show, *Eternal Arcade* (Sega) and *Grandia II* (Game Arts), were in Dreamcast's camp.

Sega also continued to reinforce Dreamcast's Internet strategy by demonstrating more online titles and services. A four-player demo of *Phantasy Star Online* was revealed, but the game was still early enough that we feel it's unlikely to arrive before 2001, despite the insistence of Sega's hype-building promotional trailer to the contrary. Sega also revealed a mobile phone connection kit and an ISDN module, in addition to the Ethernet upgrade.

The downside for Sega? Third-party support for Dreamcast was limited; however, Capcom stepped up to show off two games, both

offering online functionality. Show attendees were permitted to go head-to-head in *Power Stone 2* and *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* against competitors in Osaka.

But when it came down to third-party showings, PS2 did have a few bright moments. Konami revealed *Z.O.E.*, a 3D-shooter game featuring giant robots under the direction of none other than *Metal Gear Solid* producer Hideo Kojima. The master designer is once again teamed up with *Metal Gear Solid* character designer Shinkawa Yoji, who is responsible for *Z.O.E.*'s mech designs. The game looked similar to *Virtual On*, and the demo showed the robots flying and fighting high above a city.

The other PS2 title showing promise was Koei's sequel to its weapons-based fighting game for PlayStation, *Dynasty Warriors*. Using some of the *Kessen* code, this sequel, entitled *Shin Dynasty Warriors*, throws out the turn-based tactics and enables the player to fight as one warrior on an active battlefield. The game manages to draw a great

number of characters on the screen at the same time, and as the screenshots attest, the results look phenomenal. The player can move around freely within a fairly large environment, and a map in a corner of the screen displays enemy positions. At times, players have to hide from a number of superior enemies, or confront them with weapons or magic attacks. Due out in Japan this August, the game hopefully can make it to the U.S. in time for launch. Given the level of attention it has already garnered with *Kessen*, Koei is certainly building a reputation with PS2 enthusiasts.

While there were some exceptions, the Spring 2000 Tokyo Game Show wasn't memorable. (Oh, and there was an X-Box presentation, but it was essentially the



■ You never know what you'll be treated to at Tokyo Game Show. But we're betting Sony brings this big-ass Dual Shock2 controller to E3

same one given in March at GDC.) Hopefully, this April full in Japan is a calm before the storm of new titles that will be revealed at E3.

— Christophe Kagotan/Tom Russo



NEXTGEN GAMES

## Japan's Games go wireless



■ Sega revealed a mobile phone connection for Dreamcast, enabling users to access online services, but we're doubtful the speed of the connection would enable any kind of gaming. Bandai also announced Wonder Gate, a cellular phone connection kit that enables users to access email and the Web, and download minigames on its WonderSwan handheld gaming device. Wonder Gate will be available in Japan in June. We expect a U.S. launch announcement for the WonderSwan at E3

## The TGS games that mattered

### Jet Set Radio (Dreamcast)



■ This frantic, off-the-wall game featuring hand-drawn characters is part inline skating, part "tagging" the neighborhood and ditching the cops



### Z.O.E. (PlayStation2)



■ If this mech somehow reminds you of the Ninja from *Metal Gear Solid*, it's because they were both designed by Shinkawa Yoji



### Shin Dynasty Warriors (PlayStation2)



■ Realtime, true 3D, hand-to-hand combat featuring a battlefield full of feudal Japan's bloodthirsty warriors. What more could you want? How about a hot cup of postvictory sake





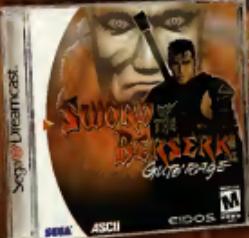
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■ PLAYSTATION2

# ONIMUSHĀ

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom ■ Release Date: Late 2000 (US) ■ Origin: Japan

## PlayStation2's cutting edge



In Japanese oni means ogre, and mushō means Samurai. And yes, Ogre Samurai figure prominently in Onimushā, a truly epic game based in 16th century Japan that pits the stoic warrior Tamanozuke against a twisted, evil demon. The opening movie sets the stage, with horrific visions of two Japanese armies annihilating each other on the field of battle. Yukihime (Tamanozuke's love interest) is kidnapped by unearthly creatures, and the vile warlord Nobunaga returns from the dead after taking a nasty arrow through the throat.

"We never thought to copy any type of movie, but we were conscious of trying to make this type of entertainment resemble the experience of going to the movies," says Keiji Inafune, the man in charge of Capcom's R&D2, the division responsible for Onimushā. But, he confesses, "we wanted to make it a bit like old Samurai movies or Kurosawa's films."

The most important distinction Inafune wants to make is that despite Onimushā's reliance on pre-rendered backgrounds and 3D characters, it isn't designed to play like another *Resident Evil*.

"Biohazard (*Resident Evil* in the U.S.) aimed to frighten people and make them retreat," explains Inafune, "but this game doesn't aim to scare people. Instead, it encourages a more dynamic, active approach to play. We don't have to do things like have a dog burst through a window. That kind of unpleasant stuff is pretty disturbing."

In fact, Inafune insists that the primary focus of the game is that "you should feel like a Samurai." To that extent, a lot of effort has been put into the sword-fighting aspect of gameplay. In the final game, there may be as many as 10 edged weapons at your disposal, all of which



With tons of edged weapons and lots of different moves at your disposal, the intense sword fights in Onimusha will be one of the primary draws of the game.



In case of under attack, Onimusha allows you against demons from Japanese mythology.

The game has a very cinematic feel to it. The team even recruited a noted film director to help them out.

can be controlled by holding R2, then using the analog thumbstick to direct different swings. Besides one-on-one matches, however, Onimusha will feature as many as eight characters onscreen at once, so up to seven enemies could surround you, leaving you no choice but to fight your way free.

Luckily you will gain experience throughout the game, which will enhance your skill set and give the game some variety.

As you might expect from the presence of demons, magic also plays a part in the experience. During the course of the quest, you will find mystic crystals that harness the

power of the elements. When combined with Tamanosuke's weapons, these crystals enable him to unleash powerful elemental attacks.

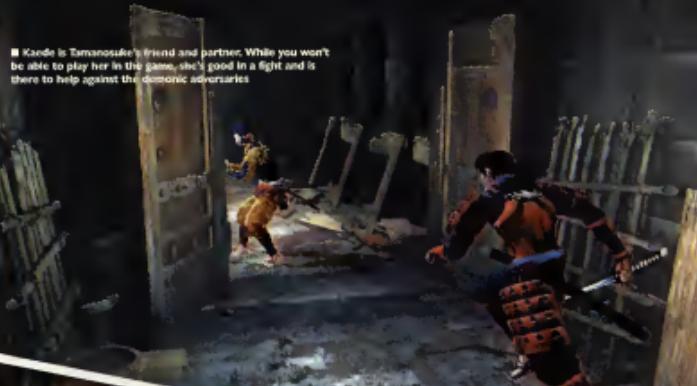
Capcom is keeping many of the finer story details under wraps, but we do know that the game focuses on the pursuit of the



Each 10,000-poly character also features detailed animation, so that every blow, parry, and feint looks as realistic as possible.



■ Kaede is Tamanosuke's friend and partner. While you won't be able to play her in the game, she's good in a fight and is there to help against the demonic adversaries



■ Realtime lighting and shadows (look! No circles!) help to give the game a dark, gritty feel



demon that has kidnapped Yukihime. Along the way, you will be assisted by Kaede, a female ninja, and will have the opportunity to interact with many other minor characters. Much of the game's action takes place in a single Japanese castle, which, like a traditional English castle, resembles a small town with many buildings housed inside the main walls. To get through this castle and reach the demon, you must defuse traps, fight off otherworldly adversaries, and eventually make your way to the hellish plane in which the demon resides.

Graphically, the game is a step beyond everything we've seen running on

PlayStation so far. While the backgrounds are prerendered, Capcom says this was done to free up polygons and enable as many as eight extremely detailed figures to be onscreen at once (we suspect it might also have something to do with the fact that *Onimusha* was originally designed for the PlayStation). Compared to Resident Evil's 400-polygon characters or even Code Veronica's 2,000-polygon models, *Onimusha*'s 10,000-polygon characters look simply stunning. These high-polygon characters will allow for a surfeit of impressive visual trickery as well, and we are told to expect effects such as characters' clothing blowing in the wind —

with different fabrics blowing in different ways. Even with all the characters onscreen, however, small details such as blowing leaves, and authentic, realtime shadows (no more Capcom circles!) won't be left out.

Thanks to the prerendered backgrounds, the game should also be able to avoid the jagged imagery that has plagued Japan's current PlayStation2 releases, resulting in what should be one of the first PlayStation2 visual masterpieces. And if the experience of guiding a Samurai through feudal Japan meets Inafune's ambitious vision, *Onimusha* may be one of the first gameplay masterpieces as well. — Bloke Fischer

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# → Alphas

Every month, **Next Generation** runs amok to bring you the latest and greatest games in development

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■ PLAYSTATION2

# MIDNIGHT CLUB STREET RACING

■ Publisher: Rockstar Games ■ Developer: Angel Studios  
■ Release Date: 2000 ■ Origin: US

**Ever wanted to drive  
against traffic at 60 mph?**



If *Ridge Racer V* showed us anything, it was that PlayStation2 has a lot of available power under its hood, but a 32-bit remake ultimately plays exactly like a 32-bit game. With *Midnight Club*, relative newcomer Angel Studios is out to create a true 128-bit driving experience that will not only showcase the dazzling graphics potential of PlayStation2, but also help to define the console racing experience for the next generation.

The game starts off simply enough. As a cab driver in New York, you drive around the city (complete with literally

hundreds of CPU-controlled cars) until you run into a "hookman," whose car is easily identifiable because it shows up on your radar. Your first real test is to keep up with him. You'll have to dodge traffic, create shortcuts, and avoid nasty crashes. Survive, and you'll be invited to race against his "friends" in a much more complicated race through different checkpoints in the city.

"We figured the one thing people really want to do is get in their car and drive like a madman in the real world," says Producer Glen Hernandez, "with no regard to what happens to other people's vehicles or themselves."



# → Alphas



The racing philosophy behind *Midnight Club* reflects this chaotic ideal through wide-open environments that you can take advantage of as you see fit. While there will always be a direct route to follow, you may find that the path of least resistance includes going against traffic on one-way streets, taking longer routes with less congestion, and, of course, finding lots of hidden shortcuts.

"The key to this game," confides designer Darren Chisum, "is that you can go anywhere you want and you really have to learn the layout of the city."

Should you succeed in your first adventure against the city's best racers, you will be given their phone numbers so that you can call them up and race head-to-head. The prize? Nothing short of their pink slips. You can then take your new car up against even tougher



■ Each city in the game may not have the exact layout as its real-life counterpart, but the look and feel are dead on

opponents, and eventually travel to London and Tokyo, where the cycle will continue. All in all, there are 33 cars to acquire, II models with 3 levels of tuning each.

Although *Midnight Club*'s technology may be great, the one mantra we heard

repeated by the team members during our visit was that gameplay is always king. While it is definitely cool to see a realistic physics engine that enables a CHiPs-style 20-car pileup caused by reckless racing, realism will always take a back seat to the fun of the driving experience. To this end, the controls — which consist of steering with the left analog thumbstick and accelerating and braking with the right analog thumbstick — are already tuned to perfection, easily rivaling those of *Ridge*

## IT'S ABOUT ATTITUDE

While *Midnight Club* might not be a wholly realistic simulation of actual street racing, many hours of research were put in to make sure that the game reflects the styles and attitudes of its real-life counterpart. Besides capturing the flavor of true street racing, the research actually helped to determine the II CPU drivers whom you race against in the game. Interestingly enough, the team found that women often participated in these racing events, so it became necessary to make sure that women were represented in the game's CPU rosters.

**"We figured the one thing people want to do is get in their car and drive like a madman."**

— Glen Hermans



■ There are 11 cars you can acquire in the game — each of which has three progressive upgrade packages, bringing the total number of cars to 33

Racer or Crazy Taxi. Cars still react believably enough, with fully modeled suspensions no less, but when we took one corner a little too sharply, hit a curb, and popped up on two tires, we were still able to maintain control, dodging the oncoming traffic to get back into the race. It was an exhilarating experience, one that you'd expect to get from the latest Hollywood big budget chase scene, rather than a console racing game.

The three real-world locations used as settings have been designed with the same fun-over-realism philosophy. While they may not be exact, each of the three cities has been researched to an incredible extent. More than 2,500 images as well as hours of videotape of



■ Crashing into other cars is all but inevitable as you race towards each goal. Your own car, as well as each car you hit, will physically show damage



building sites, props, people, and, of course, cars are in the game. So, while every back and side street may not be modeled to perfection, players familiar with Manhattan can always tell which way they are headed just by being able to see the Empire State Building towering over the other buildings. All in all, each map will contain more than 50 kilometers of roads to drive on, complete with one-way streets, major intersections, and plenty of secret paths through buildings, over rooftops, and, in one case, across the deck of an aircraft carrier.

— Blake Fischer



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■ While some shortcuts may involve cutting through a one-way street, others may take you through — or even over — buildings in the city



■ Expect lots of eye candy. Angel Studios is devoting lots of time to making sure it fully exploits the PS2 hardware





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SO POWERFUL, IT'S KIND OF RIDICULOUS

# →Alphas





■ The ship designs in *Freelancer* look like no other before them. Each individual fighter is made up of more than 2,000 polygons and features more than a dozen different moving parts.

■ PC

# FREELANCER

■ Publisher Microsoft ■ Developer Digital Anvil ■ Release Date Spring 2001 ■ Origin US

## Living worlds? How about living galaxies

The sight of the Death Star through the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon is as thrilling to the psyche today as it was 23 years ago. Producer and Digital Anvil founder Chris Roberts knows all too well that this is the stuff that sci-fi legends are made of, and with his newest project, *Freelancer*, he is making an ambitious bid to create a legend of his own. Using state-of-the-art technology, classic storytelling, and a unique universe that is awesome in both size and scope, he and his team at Digital Anvil are hoping

to forge the icons for a new generation of sci-fi fans.

*Freelancer* is a space combat game, one played primarily from the cockpit (although these screens may have you thinking otherwise), but one far more

ambitious than any other before it. In order to break out of the gameplay mold space games have been built from for the last 10 years, Roberts and team have sat down and rethought every single design paradigm in the genre.

**"One of the things we wanted to do with *Freelancer* is have a universe that is very different in texture and feel than is normally seen in computer games and films."**

—Chris Roberts

■ If you decide to make a living by piracy goods, you better be ready for a big fight when the game starts to send bounty hunters after you.



# → Alphas



■ Missions you receive can be as simple as escorting (or flying) cargo across the galaxy, but you always have to be on the lookout for raiders attempting to rob you. This is where your guns come in handy.

"We wanted the playing experience different and the interface different so the experience would feel fresh," stresses Roberts. The most radical change is the switch from the standard, "steer your cursor around with the joystick and shoot stuff in your crosshairs" gameplay (pioneered, ironically enough, by Roberts himself in the groundbreaking *Wing Commander* series) to an entirely new mouse-driven control interface. While it seems trivial at first, this single change revolutionizes

the space sim. Besides making the game more accessible (how many people really have the hardcore setup to properly enjoy a space sim?), it also makes it far more interactive and, most importantly, intuitive to use. After a little practice, even veteran space joystick jockeys will be pulling off advanced maneuvers with the same finesse they're used to — and some may even find that there are more options available to them now than ever before.

Space flight is only a part of the

**I**"You could still play in the universe 40 to 50 hours after you played the single player game, and you'll still be finding things you've never seen before."

— Chris Roberts

■ Each planet's culture is expressed through its architecture, as seen in this bar on a Kurostava planet. While the level of detail is incredible, let us assure you that everything you're seeing here is done in real time, and the camera adjusts to what you're doing.



formula, and Roberts and his team have been hard at work building a living, breathing universe for players to take part in.

"Space itself is very busy," points out Roberts as he tries to describe the sheer amount of content he and his team have had to create from scratch. "We have 30 core systems in the universe, and each system can have two to three different areas you can land on. Then the system itself has a whole bunch of detail: There could be an asteroid field, and inside the asteroid field, there could be a mining operation. There could be nebulae, gas mining, orbital manufacturing platforms, and merchant ships coming and going."

As the player traverses the *Freelancer* universe, a single set of rules is keeping everything running in the background — rules the *Freelancer* team had to lay down before any gameplay was implemented. For example, an industrial planet may use the gas from a gas mining operation for its production. So if you wanted to be a pirate and raid the delivery ships, the industrial planet's ruling body would eventually react. The reaction would depend on the severity of the situation, but it would probably start off with a bounty being offered on your head, and other characters in the universe (CPU or human) could seek the reward. Of course, the longer you

## PEOPLE, PEOPLE, EVERYWHERE!

While the initial retail release will feature some multiplayer components (up to 16 players can interact with the world at once), *Digital Avril* will almost immediately follow up the game with *Freelancer Online* for the 2001 holiday season. Roberts dropped us a few tidbits about the online aspect: "A lot of things in the single player will set up the universe for the multiplayer," adding only that, "the actual design goal is to get a vast amount of people in the same universe — much more so than in *EverQuest*."

Just how many more players? Roberts isn't telling, but he does say that we can expect somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 people in the same world at once.



■ When you land on a planet you can choose from several different areas to visit for information, equipment, or supplies.



■ You never know what shady characters you might find in a bar. Of course, these are also the guys you need to deal with to get your missions as well as crucial pieces of information.



cause trouble, the bigger the bounty.

"We've really concentrated on building rules instead of scripts," Roberts points out. "This way you can't really predict everything, and the game really reacts and changes to your wishes."

It wouldn't be a game, however, if there were no point to the experience, and *Freelancer* involves players in a storyline that follows strange alien races, political infighting, and the eventual discovery of the mysterious cause of Earth's apparent destruction 800 years ago. Still, following the storyline is an option, because after a few introductory missions, you'll decide your own fate. "The idea is that you never play the story if you don't want to," says Roberts. "You could just go off and be a pirate or a merchant and make as much money as



With the money you earn from missions, you can rebuild your ship with better weapons, engines, and shields. Of course, this means that you can take on more dangerous (and profitable) tasks.

possible, but there is a story there and you can be a part of it."

Of course, for many, this just means more sleepless nights as they explore the outer reaches of the galaxy, trying to see all that it has to offer, and this is just what Roberts and the rest of the team wants to see.

"One of our biggest goals," he admits, "was to have a pretty open-ended game so you could still play in the universe 40 to 50 hours after you played the single-player game, and you'll still be finding things you've never seen before."

And trust us, after your first glimpse of gameplay, you'll want to view every wonder in the game personally.

Roberts and team have created a technological marvel with *Freelancer*, and its depictions of otherworldly travel and combat have floored the privileged few who have seen them in action.

Despite the eye candy, however, Roberts insists that the game will still be playable on a system as low as a PII-400 with a TNT video card — not too high end. For those with 700MHz-plus Athlons and GeForce cards (or better), the game will scale upwards nicely and provide some of the greatest visuals ever seen on a PC monitor.

Complementing the graphics power of the game engine is an exotic and volatile game universe that is very different in texture and feel than normally seen in computer games and films.

"The idea was to come up with this retro sci-fi feel," Roberts says, "with feudal houses, political intrigue, and a real stylized look to the universe and the ships."

Each of the game's four main cultures is modeled after a period from history. The nation of Kurosawa, for example, is modeled after feudal Japan, while Liberty (the Americans) appears to be an art deco culture from the 30<sup>th</sup> century. Each nation embodies its own beliefs, alliances, and missions for you, the freelancer to accomplish in its name. Be careful, though, because they all keep tabs on you as well. The sabotage mission you wage on Brittonia (the contingent based on Victorian England) won't make "the Brits" easy to deal with next time you need a favor.

While *Freelancer* is still some ways off, it will likely reinvent the modern space-epic, a genre Roberts kicked off with the first *Wing Commander* in 1990. And as his storyline extends well beyond this game, *Freelancer* may just be the first in what could be the one of the greatest sci-fi epics of all time. — Blake Fischer



■ Special effects in *Freelancer* look as if they belonged in a movie.



■ Using the mouse, you can gaze around the cockpit (the ship's guns will track your view) or, if you hold down the left button, steer. The trick is learning how to switch between the free look and steering modes efficiently for maximum combat ability.



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# → Alphas

## WHO ARE YOU?

The identity of the main character is something of a mystery at press time. While all the screens provided by Climax Graphics show the onscreen character as a male, the trailers released so far show a woman in a short skirt, which apparently names Erika. However, the bar at the bottom of the screens is clearly labeled "Randy" in both cases, which we have to believe was a placeholder — we can't imagine the need for a bar to indicate "femininity." Furthermore, our Japanese correspondent noted four characters on the select screen; it's probable that you'll simply be able to select between two (or more) characters, either at the beginning of the game or during it (switching between them as in *Blue Stinger*), but it is a bit of a mystery.



### DREAMCAST

# ILLBLEED

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Climax Graphics  
■ Release Date: Fall 2000 ■ Origin: US

## More horror, less survival

→ Climax Graphics was there for Dreamcast's launch with the good-looking but ultimately uneven *Blue Stinger*. Recently, the developer's parent group, Climax, followed up with the generally good-looking but ultimately uneven *Time Stalkers* (a.k.a. *Climax Landers*). Still, with the upcoming *Bleed*, it's possible the third time will be the charm.

The game has an interesting, almost self-

referential premise. A mysterious entrepreneur named Michael Reynolds has built a horror theme park, spending several billion dollars to construct the ultimate haunted house. However, this is a far cry from Disney World — visitors aren't attracted by the promise of thrills and chills, but by a prize of \$1 million. The only catch is that to collect the money, they have to make it through the house alive.



■ The Horror Monitor enables you to take stock of your surroundings, so you can rely on your senses to spot danger



■ Did we mention that no one has ever managed to get through this theme park and survive? Not Oh well...



■ Watch the heart meter in the lower right corner in action: getting attacked by a mutant zombie with a flamethrower is bad enough, but note how it really gets the character's heart rate soaring, to the point at which the heart may burst.

So far no one has.

Worse, to quote Albleed's trailer, "Behind the offer lies a secret. More shocking than what you see. More costly than you'll ever know. They'll do anything to feed your desire." Scary eh kids? In any event, it puts a slightly different spin on the "survival horror" genre — things will jump out at you because the entire environment has been deliberately designed for just that purpose.

The game's developers have even gone so far as to call the horrific set pieces "Shock Events," and they claim there are more than 1,500 such events within Albleed's haunted house. You're free to

## "Behind the offer lies a secret. More shocking than what you see. More costly than you'll ever know. They'll do anything to feed your desire."

move through the house, uncovering the events as you go. Most are quite deadly; some are designed to kill the main character instantly if they can't be successfully avoided, and others simply contribute to an increase in heart rate and blood pressure (shown by an onscreen meter). Let the character get too scared, and they may faint or suffer heart failure.

**To help you avoid shocks** and survive, you have four senses: vision, hearing, smell, and a "sixth sense." These senses are shown onscreen via a Horror Monitor, which indicates when the character notices various stimuli. Hopefully you'll then be able to figure out where the danger is, and either get away from it or find some other way of eliminating or

outwitting the threat.

The footage and screenshots shown so far include some stereotypical horror movie standbys (lightning crackling over a darkened mansion), but also some disturbing imagery. Blue Stinger proved the developer's ability to conjure up some pretty freaky creatures, and Albleed is continuing that tradition in spades. The game certainly appears to have a dark, creepy atmosphere, loaded with plenty of gory horror and frightening visuals. In fact, it would seem that Albleed comes closer to fitting the term "survival horror" than the series that coined the term, *Resident Evil* — the emphasis appears to be less on action, and more on simply surviving the game's numerous horrific experiences. This is one game to watch in the coming months. — Christof Kogotan/Jeff Lundrigan



■ The horror-filled environment is dotted with "Shock Events" designed to terrify your character — and you. Climax claims there are 1,500 of them.



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■ PLAYSTATION2

# ARMORED CORE 2

■ Publisher: Agetea ■ Developer: From Software ■ Release Date: US Launch ■ Origin: Japan

The bigger they are, the harder they hit

With their over-the-top weaponry and vast scale, giant robots seem almost uniquely

suited to videogames. From Software, one of the masters of the style, has been quietly refining the genre on PlayStation

9999



■ The HUD is fully customizable so you can decide what information is vital for survival.



for the last several years (and recently on Dreamcast). Now, PlayStation2 has lifted the design shackles, and the team can now combine the gameplay techniques they've tweaked to nigh perfection with some state-of-the-art visuals to give gamers an exciting new experience.

Unlike the sole, one-on-one robot combat of Virtual On, Armored Core 2's gameplay delivers mission-based objectives. A deep backstory places you

■ Mission objectives will range from seek-and-destroy to hostage rescue

# → Alphas

In the middle of a struggle between rival corporations, and as a mercenary with some robot piloting skills, you must choose which factors to work for in your quest to become "Nine Breaker" — the highest honor a soldier can attain. Unfortunately, as you accept missions from one corporation, others will get angry with you, and subsequently stop offering you work, causing the storyline to change. Missions themselves range from the typical "find the bad guy and blow him up," to guard duty and more elaborate hostage-rescue situations. If you're craving some arena-based fighting, don't worry because you can always take on a friend in the split-screen head-to-head mode (using robots built in the single-player mode).



■ Take your mech into the garage and you can modify and upgrade 14 different systems

One of the best features about the *Armored Core* series is the ability to modify your robot in the garage, and this version offers the most detailed customization options yet. There is a total of 14 different areas on each robot that can be customized (three more than previous versions), and you can even stockpile special one-of-a-kind parts (found in certain missions) for use in later designs — a feature sorely lacking in older versions. The technology available



to you also changes depending on which corporations you work for, so in order to build your perfect fighting machine, you have to be conscious of with whom you are still on speaking terms. Other options include the ability to paint your robot, as well as design a 128-by-128 logo to emblazon on it.

**As the series** is making a generational leap, many improvements have been made to the graphics. Besides the substantially more detailed robots — each with dozens of tiny moving parts — the environments have also been enlarged and enhanced for a more lifelike gameplay experience. The early versions of *Armored Core* 2 seen by **Nex Generation** also maintain a highly playable frame rate of 60 FPS. Players can also customize their HUDs with up to 13 different information panels, displaying everything from the locations of enemies in the environment to the amount of ammo left in each gun.

While no one would argue that *Armored Core* 2 is a revolutionary game, it is an evolutionary step that fans will greet with open arms. With staggering graphics, an involved single-player experience, and two-player arena fighting, this could be the console mech game that covers all the bases. — Blake Fischer



■ Depending on your play style, you can either take enemies out with ranged weapons or close in for some hand-to-hand fighting

## THE LONG ROAD TO THREE

The *Armored Core* series has what is commonly known as the "Street Fighter Syndrome." Believe it or not, *Armored Core* 2 is actually the fourth game in the series after *Armored Core*, *AC: Project Phantasma*, and *AC: Next Generation*. The ever-hopeful editors at *Nex Generation* are already here to help from Software decide what the next game in the series could be called: *Super AC Turbo Hyper Fighter*, *AC: Third Impact*, or for the non-so-hardcore mech fan, *AC: Robot Puzzle Fighter*.



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# → Alphas



■ Thanks to a new physics system and redone character models, *Pro Skater 2* (including Tony's Colgate smile) looks and animates far better than its predecessor.



■ PLAYSTATION, DREAMCAST, PC

# TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Neversoft ■ Release Date: Late Summer 2000 ■ Origin: US

How do you make the best even better?  
Build it yourself

■ Turtle Boy is typically a street skater, but he gets enough big air to pull off some big tricks. The game now tracks which foot you have forward, so you have different abilities when tricking from your strong side



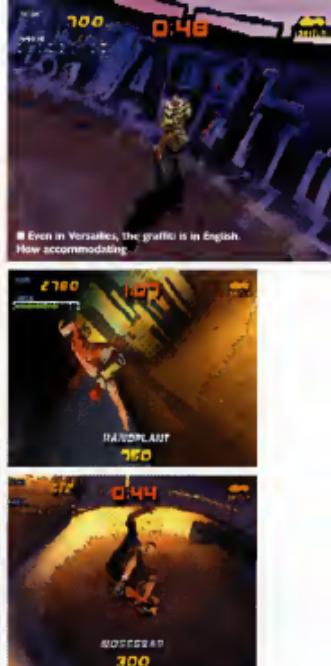
Sequels to successful games are often disappointing, simply because designers ignore Murphy's Law and insist on fixing what isn't broken. Thus, we were understandably concerned when Activision offered to stop by with the sequel to last year's smash hit, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. As it turns out, we should have had a little more faith in developer Neversoft. —*Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* looks fantastic.

There are tons of new multiplayer games, ranging from vert competition to a skateboarder's version of H-O-R-S-E. New locations include Skate Street in Ventura (where Tony's motion capture for the first game was done). Also, there are now ten different skills that influence a skater's performance, and each of the 13 skaters (three more than the original) knows a

specific list of tricks. Because of this, *Pro Skater 2* will contain at least two times more stunts than the original, and possibly as much four times, with each skater boasting a much more unique feel.

The game is also infinitely customizable. You can tweak each skater's move set, or even create your own custom skater, selecting their look, which stunts they know, and even their corporate sponsors. Then you can move on to the coolest feature of all — a skate park editor, where you can use more than 100 different elements (ramps, rails, half-pipes — you name it) to build the skate park of your dreams from the ground up.

Give Neversoft credit. It's deftly taking a beloved franchise to the next level. Barring some unforeseen development problems, you should expect a new and



Improved Hawk to soar into stores late this summer  
—Eric Bratcher



■ The park editor allows you to create levels quickly and easily. Each finished park only takes up about one block of memory

## PENGJAI SHAN — FREAKIER THAN HELL

Fear Effect climaxed in a dramatic showdown in what may or may not have been hell. Not to be outdone, Retro Helix will include a trip to Pengjai Shan, a mystical island that's prominent in Chinese Taoist teachings. The mountainous island is surrounded by "weak" water that can't support ships, and is populated by eight immortal beings. We don't yet know which immortals will appear in the game, but here are some to watch out for: Zhongli Quan, a custy hermit who carries a fan that can remove a dead; Li Tiegua, who needs a crutch but holds a smoking gourd that separates the spirit from the body; and Lu Dongbin, who wields a sword to fight against evil "monsters," which undoubtedly will include you.



■ While the finished product won't boast quite this resolution (these shots are fresh from the dev kit), both the backgrounds and models should benefit from enhancements to the game engine.

## ■ PLAYSTATION2

# FEAR EFFECT: RETRO HELIX

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Kronos Interactive ■ Release Date: TBA ■ Origin: US

Hana returns — with a blonde friend.

Now that's progress



Mixing suspense, an oddly macabre soft-spoken story, and some unique hand-animated characters, Fear Effect proved to be one of the more satisfying titles of recent months. The upcoming prequel, Retro Helix, is still early in development, but we managed to get a glimpse of the game.

Retro Helix will refine and expand upon the basic design of the original Fear Effect. The plot of the game is again

based on Chinese mythology, but this time around it involves a new, fourth controllable character named Rain, and the search for her evil twin sister, Mist. This four-disc quest will lead the heroes through eight different locations, including New York's Hell's Kitchen, and the lost tomb of China's first emperor. Along the way, they'll find new weapons, like a flame thrower and grenade launchers.

■ These shots are from the dev kit, but the environments look every bit as large and detailed as before.

Kronos is also working to correct what didn't work in Fear Effect by incorporating fewer one-hit death situations, a revised 3D control scheme, and an improved inventory system to address the original's somewhat daunting difficulty level. Best of all, the excessive postdeath reload screens that plagued Fear Effect will be replaced by... nothing. The player will now be able to instantly restart from the last save point.

As deep as Fear Effect was, Kronos has dedicated itself to enhancing the replay value of Retro Helix. The game will offer a branching storyline and a number of different endings. Once the player completes a game in its entirety, a new game will introduce entirely new enemies, as well as other hidden features.

We'll revisit Retro Helix as it progresses. Judging by first impressions, this will be one to watch for.

— Eric Bratcher



■ Jen, Li, and Rain join forces this time around to keep avertable fallen show off of custom skins.



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# → Alphas



The new arenas have been designed with more open space, providing fewer enclosed scenes, such as this submarine-based stage. Fighters can now man the gun turrets and fire shells at their opponents.

■ ARCADE, DREAMCAST

# POWER STONE 2

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom ■ Release Date: Spring (Arcade) ■ Origin: Japan

Fighting over magic gems just got a hell of a lot more intense

The argument is still raging over which is the better Dreamcast title: Namco's traditional yet beautiful Soul Calibur, or Capcom's

feisty, frenzied and — for a fighting game at least — inventive Power Stone! No one knows what Namco has up its sleeve at the moment, but it will have a battle of biblical proportions on its hands should it try to top the promising Power Stone 2.

The original game structure remains intact: Power Stone 2 is still an arena-based fighter. Combattants have full 3D maneuverability and can pick up various objects to throw at enemies. The core play system has also been retained: you must collect colored gems to power-up your fighter, allowing him/her to unleash more devastating moves. From here on, however, everything has been expanded. Most obviously, four players, rather than two, can now take part in the every-

man-for-himself rioting in beautifully realized, multilevel environments.

These stages are much more complex than those of the first title.



■ Combat vehicles are now operable



Egyptian burial chambers, weird sci-fi industrial complexes, and even surfaced submarines at sport things such as ramps, holes, conveyor belts, chasms, and platforms to give the fighting a fully three-dimensional feel. The arenas also evolve during a bout. In the Blue Sky stage, for example, the battle begins on a flying fortress, which explodes, sending the fighters plummeting towards Earth — still fighting. The skirmish reaches its climax on a hidden military base.

**This Is Inspired level design. And It doesn't end there.** The arenas also contain new interactive objects, such as gun emplacements, which fighters can

climb into and shoot from, and various vehicles (hovercraft, airplanes, and tanks), which can be driven about and used as weapons. There are even a few creatures that add another element to combat — **Next Generation** found a huge arachnid monster that in any other game would appear as the ultimate end-of-level boss. The designers have clearly written the word "subtlety" on a piece of paper, torn it up, and thrown it out the window.

Interestingly, the game is being developed simultaneously for Dreamcast and Naomi, with VMU compatibility added — players will be able to download data from the coin-op version



■ Each of the stages contains many levels to fight on, adding more depth to the combat. Background detail is impressively diverse, too.

**In the Blue Sky stage, the battle begins on a flying fortress, which explodes, sending the fighters plummeting towards Earth — still fighting**



■ Some levels are occupied by massive creatures, resembling end-of-level bosses. Rendered with Capcom's usual flair, they add an intriguing twist.

to open new features in the console equivalent. If nothing else, this seems like a great way to get gamers back into the arcade.

Four new, manga-style characters — Accel, Julia, Pete, and Gourmand — have been added, perhaps as an effort to court a younger audience; comparisons have already been made to Nintendo's kid-friendly *Smash Bros* title. But despite the immediacy of its control system and the gaudiness of its fighters, *Power Stone 2* retains a harder edge than anything you'd find Mario or Luigi endorsing. With its full-on destructive possibilities alone, it should appeal to gamers of any age. — Nigel Edge



## FOUR-PLAYER COMBAT

The idea of a 3D, four-player fighting game isn't necessarily new, but it hasn't really been done right yet (*Wu Tang Clan*, the only one released, earned three stars). The problem with the concept is that developers have always felt the need to somehow adhere to the legacy of the two-player fighting game, which leads to some confusion in a four-player situation — especially in regards to blocking. The *Power Stone* series, with its unique image of 3D fighting without blocking at all, seems natural for four players. *Power Stone 2* could be the first game that gets it right.

■ In this sequel, the camera is farther from the stages to allow for two extra characters.

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# → Alphas



■ Your characters will attack, dodge, and parry on their own, but you'll do better if you micromanage the attacks they use and which enemies they concentrate on

## ■ PLAYSTATION2

# SUMMONER

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Volition ■ Release Date: Launch ■ Orig: U.S.

This giant, scythe-wielding Minotaur followed me home. Can we keep him?



In Volition's action/RPG

Summoner, the player controls a party of adventurers led by Joseph, a man with the ability to call up fantastic creatures to assist him in his exploits. While the title's PC release has been delayed until early 2001, the flagship PlayStation2 version will arrive this fall.

hand-in-hand with the system's U.S. debut. The best news is the degree to which this version resembles its PC sibling. Except for the notable lack of online play and anti-aliening, the two versions are nearly indistinguishable.

Lead PS2 Programmer James Hague believes that Sony's hardware lives up to the hype. Aside from a skeletal animation system that enables smoother transitions between animations, he cites the model for Joseph, which uses almost 1,300 polygons. "If you could put the camera inside Joseph's head," says Hague, "you'd see he has polygonal teeth and a tongue."

The hardware also enables advanced AI; for instance, if an enemy is faced with a wall of fire on one side, and your summoned Earth Elemental on the other, it will opt to run through the fire, as the flames will inflict less damage.

Despite these technical achievements, Hague is most proud of another facet of the game. "I think the most impressive



thing," he says, "is how well the story integrates into everything." Indeed, each of Joseph's three companions has a story of his own, and the developing plot is tightly woven into the gameplay. Still, we have to admit we rather enjoyed summoning a Minotaur to whoop ass on our behalf.

—Eric Bratcher

■ Each of your companions has his own motivations and goals as well, so be careful when turning your back on a "friend."



■ Players will be able to summon more than 20 different creatures, including this fire-loving Red Minotaur.



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# →Alphas



These are what the actual players look like in the game! Of course, if you played with the camera this low to the ground, you'd never complete a pass, never mind win — but it sure looks great.



The players are in focus, but the crowd isn't — a neat effect.

## PLAYSTATION 2

# FIFA SOCCER WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Canada ■ Release Date: April (Japan), October (US) ■ Origin: Canada

Will EA score when this franchise hits PS2?

While "the beautiful game" may never become the sport of choice in the U.S., EA Sports has groomed the FIFA series, committing AAA resources to a franchise with global selling power that far surpasses the demand for Madden. As the franchise makes its PS2 debut, the team at EA Canada prepares once again to redefine the state-of-the-art sports game and, if they're lucky, snag a few more fans along the way.

Of course, as we've seen in most PS2 titles, the biggest change is in the sheer amount of details put on the screen. Player models have received the biggest upgrade, going from 260 polys in the PSX games (650 in the accelerated PC versions) to a whopping 5,000 on the PS2. Onscreen players are now so finely detailed that you can see their facial expressions, individual fingers, and even the little EA Sports logos on their cleats.

Other notable extras include coaches shouting at people from the sidelines, security people in yellow jackets, and even cameramen who will always turn to face the action. Depth-of-field effects will keep foreground characters in sharp focus, while maintaining a softer focus on background characters.

Certainly, the graphics have changed, but expect the gameplay to remain as solid as it ever has been. "We're pretty

happy with the FIFA formula," confesses Product Manager Nick Maleperman. Still, he admits that the designers are tightening the gameplay even further over previous installments.

While it may not be the revolutionary emotional experience heralded by Ken Kutaragi, FIFA takes a great evolutionary step. With the graphics in place, it gives the team something else to shoot for next year.

— Blake Fischer



Check out all of the action going on around the field — flags waving, cameramen tracking the action, and, even though they're a little small in this shot, players warming up by the bench.



With 22 leagues, 18 teams per league, and 18 players per team, EA has had to model 2,028 players for this game.

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# → Alphas



100 100

■ Somewhere, deep in the bowels of the Earth (OK, so it's actually a beautiful office building in LA), a sleepless team of undead slaves (yeah, yeah, Dreamworks Interactive designers, whatever) is toiling away, putting the finishing touches on a fiendishly evil tool of destruction — a first-person horror adventure set to tell the scariest story ever to grace the PC (while this part is actually true).

Wii  
PS3  
Xbox 360

## PC **CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING**

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Dreamworks Interactive ■ Release Date: Fall 2000 ■ Origin: US

Sometimes, the skeletons in the closet are reanimated family members



→ As the last of five siblings who grew up in a decaying old mansion somewhere on the coast of Ireland, Jeremiah Weedhaven has a problem. You see, his brothers and sisters are all coming back to life — and

they're not all terribly happy to see him.

Thus begins Clive Barker's *Undying*, a first-person horror title set in the 1920s, in which the player takes the role of Count Magnus Wolfman, a man equal parts Doctor Strange, Sherlock Holmes, and Blade, Vampire Hunter. Magnus comes to the aid of the beleaguered Mr. Weedhaven, and sets out to discover why his siblings can't seem to rest in peace. Magnus' adventures take him to a 12<sup>th</sup> century monastery, through a dead city once populated by wizards, and always back to the creepy Weedhaven mansion, which itself houses many secrets of the supernaturally dysfunctional Weedhaven family.

Fortunately, Magnus has quite the arsenal. His weapons include a revolver, a shotgun, the Tibetan War Cannon

(an elaborate dragon's head that belches spheres of pure coldness), and an array of 16 spells, each of which can be upgraded. For instance, the Ectoplasm spell can be enhanced to shoot through walls, and lightning can be cast upon the spear gun to create electrified spears. Other spells illuminate the enemy or summon monsters of your own creation. Most important to the story is the Sorye spell, which enables Magnus to view hidden clues, see invisible enemies, or envision past events.

Surprisingly, much of the suspense builds from one of the game's most

■ The ruler of the dreamlike realm Oneiros is the wizard Kleisinger. As ugly as this concept art (left), b., Magnus' in-game model (below) looks nearly as detailed



Fortunately, Magnus has quite the arsenal. His weapons include a revolver, a shotgun, the Tibetan War Cannon

■ This is the in-game model for a Lovecraftian leviathan called a Mento-Shonol. He's about the size of a semi cab and has his very own tractor beam, so going head-to-enormous-head with him is just like fighting a small Death Star with teeth





■ Realtime morphing will allow certain characters (like Lisbeth here) to transform from beauty to beast in the blink of an eye.

## CLIVE BARKER? WHAT DOES HE KNOW ABOUT HORROR?

Maintaining tension is a horror game is both crucial and difficult, but the team is blessed with the enthusiastic support of one of the true masters of horror, the one and only Clive Barker. Although coming late to the project, Barker has proven to be a veritable fountain of ideas. Says Producer Brady Bell, "You schedule a half hour with the guy, and four hours later you're leaving and he's saying 'OK, we'll talk tomorrow!'"

controversial aspects — the first-person point of view. "We were absolutely adamant that this had to be first-person," claims Lead Designer Dell Siebert, "because of the limited field of vision, and the tricks you can do with sound."

Of course, it also helps keep combat realistic, something Siebert feels very strongly about. "When you get into combat, I want it to be about your skill in fighting these creatures, not about having your third-person character autocorrect for you." The first-person aspect will be further exploited by an online multiplayer mode, in which deathmatch combatants will spawn with a full arsenal of weapons and spells.

**To bring *Undying* to life,** the development team is busy enhancing the Unreal engine. (You didn't think they were using the Trespasser engine, did you?) In addition to skeletal animation and 1500-polygon models, the finished game will

## "In combat, I want it to be about your fighting skills, not about your character autoaiming"

— Dell Siebert

boast features like an elaborate wind system and a truly realistic cloth model. Siebert points out, "Much of this is just technology for other games, but for us, these things are tools for the designers to tell the story." It will enable curtains that flutter as an invisible creature approaches, and gusts of wind that can blow out the last flickering candle in a room.

The design team has gone to great lengths to create a distinct atmosphere for the game, crucial for a horror title. With a background in art history, Art Director Jeff Hayne strives to make each texture, each piece of art, look like it belongs with that character and in that realm. It's not generic 'skulls and blood' horror."

The soundtrack is being scored by film

composer Bill Brown (whose recent work includes Oliver Stone's *Any Given Sunday*), and perfectly captures the feel of the game. Preliminary samples included an early ambient Gregorian chant targeted for the monastery, to a vast Celtic theme that could have been plucked from *Titanic*, had the film included a "nightmare" sequence.

Clive Barker's *Undying* looks as though it will do for the roiling twenties what *Half-Life* and *System Shock 2* did for modern and futuristic times — combine the white-knuckle action of an FPS with a chilling, cinematic story. If schedules are kept, you should be able to discover the Weedhaven's family secrets this fall, but remember in the 1920s, there was no BFG. — Eric Bratcher



■ These vicious Howlers exhibit true pack-based AI. Although blind, they can hear your footsteps, and they're just a little bit faster than you; they'll also take cover at times, attacking when you stop to reload.



# → Alphas

The spell system in *Dungeon Siege* is limited to a few basic spells that evolve as the character uses them and gains experience. This eliminates the need to toggle to a spell book, and brings the focus back to combat action.

■ PC

# DUNGEON SIEGE

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Gas Powered Games  
■ Release Date: Spring-Summer 2001 ■ Origin: US

Will Chris Taylor's next project totally annihilate *Diablo II*?

When Total Annihilation designer Chris Taylor shifted-clicked his units away from Cavedog and set a waypoint for his own Gas Powered Games, everyone expected another masterful real-time strategy affair. Surprisingly, the first game out of the chute will be an RPG. Hold onto your goblins, because Taylor and gang plan to turn the genre on its ear with *Dungeon Siege*.

As with *Diablo*, *Dungeon Siege* is an action-oriented RPG, but the similarities dissolve from there. Firstly, unlike *Diablo* the game is rendered in realms 3D, enabling fluid character movement, free camera movement, and, perhaps most importantly, one seamless world with indoor and outdoor environments that are both figuratively and literally extremely deep. Quite amazingly, the game has no loading screens to separate environments, so the entire 70- to 80-hour single-player game is one enormous map. The first time you tread down a sunken path into a dungeon, and the ground (now ceiling) slowly fades away, you'll wonder why no one has ever done this before. Gone are the invisible portals that separate indoor



■ After players go through the entire game, they can create their own worlds

and outdoor regions, a fact illustrated by our demo when a ravenous dungeon-dwelling creature unexpectedly followed our party out into the wilderness.

**"In traditional RPGs something simple like switching from a bow to sword is so tedious that typically you wouldn't bother.... Now we have a way of switching quickly so you will play better and have more fun."**

— Chris Taylor

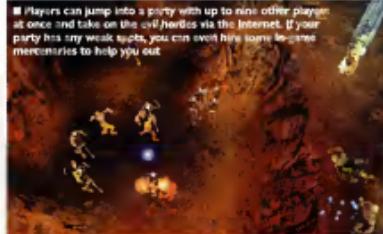
## COMBUSTIBLE

While Chris Taylor's standard diet of prime rib sandwiches and Canadian candy bars would lead one to believe the origins of the name Gas Powered Games came from, ahem, here's the real story: The moniker comes from Taylor's observation that gas-powered tools always seem to be more robust than their electric counterparts. Take, for example, lawn mowers, weed-eaters, and compressed-air power tools; even the RC vehicles of Taylor's youth work with this equation. So, appropriating the prefix "Gas Powered" seemed fitting from Taylor's perspective, because he envisions the company making games that will make others pale in comparison. We're still guessing that at some level the name has to do with flatulence, but we'll give Chris the benefit of the doubt until we smell otherwise.

The other differentiating factor is the gracefully simple edict that exploring new areas and killing things is fun, while tedious party management is not. In this vein, players can choose to play the game with one to ten party members, each starting with a base skill level. Instead of relying on a class-based system in which characters are predetermined archers, warriors, mages, etc., players use a skill-based system to simply develop skills they deem important. Absent is the exhausting dice rolling and outfitting process. Starting is as easy as choosing the number of people in your party and hopping right into the action. If your party of characters is seriously lacking in some skills, you can always choose to hire pretrained archers or wizards to round it out.

"You'll have lots of opportunity to balance as you play," notes Taylor, "and not get locked into something that you've invested 20 hours into and then you're stuck."

**Adding to the simple yet elegant design is the streamlined interface that borrows heavily from Taylor's RTS roots. Movement and order-stacking work just as they did with TA. Similarly, Dungeon**



■ Players can jump into a party with up to nine other players at once and take on the world heroes via the Internet. If your party has any weak spots, you can even hire some mercenaries to help you out.



■ There are about 15 different races available at this point in the game's development. Some are human while others are more like forms of mortal races. Different abilities for each race all have the same basic mechanics, so there's no class palce-swapping here.

Siege will support single keystrokes that can change the way an entire group of ten characters is equipped by switching easily from an offensive posture to a defensive one.

Taylor explains the effect of this streamlining: "In traditional RPGs, something simple like switching from a bow to sword [is so tedious that typically you wouldn't bother] and you'd just rush [an enemy] with your sword. Now we have a way of switching quickly so you'll play better and have more fun."

Beyond designing a better wheel, Taylor and his company are also supplying players with a build-your-own-wheel kit. The Siege Editor will be a powerful set of creation tools with a simplified interface that essentially will enable players to create their own infinitely expandable Dungeon Siege games. The editor gives players the latitude to create custom spells, maps, characters, enemies, and



■ The move to full 3D allows Dungeon Siege to feature spectacular views that just aren't possible in any other RPG of this type.

even cinematic sequences with a seemingly endless array of parameters. This level of customizability worked well for Total Annihilation, and Taylor is betting that it will work once again with Dungeon Siege. — Jeffrey Adam Young



■ Transitions from the world above to a dungeon's dark depths are seamless and feature no load times whatsoever; in fact, nowhere in the game should players ever have to wait for the game to load.





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# → Alphas



■ Check out the bloodstains on the fighters' clothes in this replay. Blood is life in Kengo, and you can actually bleed to death from wounds you receive during battle.

■ PLAYSTATION

## KENGO: MASTER OF BUSHIDO

■ Publisher Crave Entertainment ■ Developer Lightweight ■ Release Date Fall 2000 ■ Origin: Japan

Can Lightweight's next title forge stronger swordplay than *Bushido Blade*?

Continuing to refine concepts it pioneered in SquareSoft's *Bushido Blade* series, developer Lightweight is currently hard at work on *Kengo: Master of Bushido*, an elaborate Samurai sword-fighting simulation that, even more than the *Bushido Blade* series, encourages strategic fighting over button mashing.

Regardless of whether you happen to

be playing the game in versus mode, 100-man cut (survival) mode, or as one of three characters in single-player story mode, the key to the game will be learning the actual art of Kendo (sword fighting). You must honor the rules of true Kendo (for instance, your character will refuse to swing his sword if his enemy is out of range, because it's evidently dishonorable), while mastering Kendo's various stances

and the moves that they enable.

**Customizing your character** will play a large part in *Kengo*. The actual moves each character can use will be customizable, enabling players to create a unique arsenal of attacks, dodges, parries, and counters. (A detailed tutorial will be included with the game so that boggled Western audiences can learn the techniques and intricacies of each stance.) Furthermore, the five Tamer, or training exercises, will enhance players' attributes. Timing, intuition, and concentration can be improved, as well as endurance and accuracy.

*Kengo: Master of Bushido* is several months from completion, and it is still too soon to hold up its legacy against Square's *Bushido Blade* series. But we're looking forward to what it plans to offer: a deeper, reverent look at a fighting style that defined Japanese culture until some 150 years ago.

— Eric Bratcher



■ just for the record: Kendo (literally, "the way of the sword") is the art of Japanese sword fighting, and Kengo ("master of the sword") is the game based on it.



■ The Tamers are training exercises designed to increase your abilities: Standing in a pounding waterfall enhances your stamina, while splitting a helmet either breaks your sword or increases timing and accuracy.

## THE ORIGIN OF A LEGEND

All mysticism aside, the original Samurais focused on protecting their patron's land rights, not living by any particular code of honor. They also fought largely from horseback with a bow and arrow. As time progressed, Bushido, the Samurai rules of etiquette (mostly based on Chinese concepts regarding the virtues of a warrior), evolved, and the Samurai moved to the pedestrian, sword-based fighting style everyone remembers them for. The Samurais were known for carrying two swords, or daisho. The shorter sword was known as the shoto-wakizashi, and the longer one was the daito-katana.

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# → Alphas



■ Valuable treasures will all be guarded by the latest in high-tech security. To get the loot without being detected, you'll have to use some puzzle-solving skills as well as the latest in high-tech gadgetry.

■ PLAYSTATION2, PC, DREAMCAST, DOLPHIN

# PICASSIO

■ Publisher: TBA ■ Developer: Promethean Designs ■ Release Date: Fall 2001 ■ Origin: UK

First you steal the art. Then you get the women

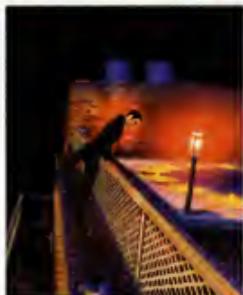


As games tread closer and closer to mainstream status, parallels with the film and music industries are becoming all too common; as the cost of development rises, publishers are taking fewer risks with original concepts. But while the odd pop star has admitted toliking their own music, many developers are still only in it for the games, and as Picasso proves, creativity remains.

Despite its rather common third-person perspective (although the viewpoint will shift into first person to simplify some of the more complicated

tasks), Picasso's "sneak'em-up" gameplay is far removed from the norm. The plot revolves around two wealthy art collectors who are having a competition to see who can gather the most valuable pieces. The player, a master thief, is commissioned by one of these collectors to break into famous art galleries — using wit, technology and carefully executed movements — to steal the world's most valuable treasures. Time is also an issue, however, because the benefactor's competitor is also contracting thieves who will race the player to each target.

■ Picasso encourages quick, calculated movements instead of just twitch skills. If you aren't careful, you could have the guards on you in an instant, and that would be bad



## POLITICALLY CONFUSED

Although largely nonviolent, weapons are an integral part of the game, but they will only temporarily disable enemies — no one ever gets killed. Chloroform, sound bombs, and tranquilizer darts will require efficient, accurate deployment, with the outcome of entire missions sometimes resting on a single shot. It's a good measure of the game's sophistication that the game can generate such excitement without involving a single bullet.



■ Breaking into maximum security areas sometimes means finding the point of least resistance (like this meat locker) and crawling in through the ventilation system.



One of the key points to the game's design is Promethean's painstaking recreation of many actual galleries with as much detail as is legally allowed. (Legislative battles have already become a key part of the development process.) The team is currently working with floor plans for the Louvre and Tate, but it's not clear what other galleries will be included. Either way the level of detail and texturing are very impressive. The more polished environments already present a level of realism that could well end up outclassing that of *Shenmue*. In fact, sources close to the team suggest that Dreamcast has been struggling, particularly with *Picasso's* four-player mode.



■ Take out guards with chloroform, or use remote cameras when deploying previously prepared traps, catching opponents off guard

## Time is an issue since your benefactor's competition is also contracting thieves who will race you to each target

**Before you even attempt your burglary** you must choose your equipment, and Promethean has not just thrown together the stereotypical gadgets — it has actually researched some current military technology. For example, infrared goggles were deemed too old-fashioned, when thermal imaging and light intensifiers would soon be available. But *Picasso* is no war sim, and the more creative gadgetry like the shadow hologram generator will complement the escapist gameplay. Which brings us to the game's most original tool — the microcamera. While progressing through a mission, players can hide pinhead-size cameras in corridors and rooms, enabling them to keep an eye on guards and opposing burglars through a realtime monitoring system. This should intensify the excitement, dividing up the players' attention, and adding the tactical element of camera placement.

Clearly *Picasso's* complexities will require some coordination, but Promethean's lead designer Clive Jones understands the importance of keeping the game flowing. "The fundamental elements of timing and stealth dictate that the control interface must be realtime. We're currently designing onscreen displays for everything from weapons and



■ The *Picasso* team is trying to create one the most thorough and believable worlds possible with today's technology

traps to the gadget bag."

While *Picasso's* success will partially depend on the artists' ability to produce all 12 environments with the pioneering realism of which they've already proved themselves capable, there's still plenty of work to be done (the facial animation, for example, could be smoother). The key to this game's ultimate success, however, lies with the designer's ability to take maximum advantage of the game's many unique concepts. If the *Picasso* team is successful in their mission, they could obtain the Holy Grail of game development, a truly original game that holds mass market appeal. — John Leaver

■ New 3D sound techniques will help you to keep track of opponents and guards. Not only will you have to avoid them, but you will also have to be on the lookout for your competition — another thief who is after the same treasures you are



■ Unfortunately for you, the losers guarding this art are invisible without the right tools



Time  
00:27:51

Lap  
1/8

4th

PLAYSTATION, DREAMCAST, PC

# HYDRO SPRINT

Publisher TBA Developer Promethean Designs

Release Date: Fall 2001 Origin: UK

Does this aquatic racer hold water?

The water physics will possibly be the game's greatest strength, with racing lines that will change depending on the tide

**→** U.K.-based Promethean Designs has set its sights high — really high. With *Hydro Sprint*, the team is attempting to take speedboats into the racing mainstream by promoting the customization levels of *Gran Turismo* and the graphical realism of *Metropolis Street Racer*. Matching racing's finest may be tough, but Promethean knows these

goals must be met if *Hydro Sprint* is to become a truly breakthrough product.

Like *MSR*, *Hydro Sprint* will benefit from extensive photographic research with tracks modeled on actual waterways, including London's Thames and Germany's Rhine rivers. The game's thorough design plan reads like a thesis on how to optimize the complexity of

the water-racing arena, and that doesn't just mean translating simulation elements from car games. Changes in tide will alter the optimum racing line. A low tide will expose obstacles such as wrecks and sand banks, for instance. Racing conditions will also depend on the size of the waves (clearly, rain and snow won't have the same effect as in the traditional racer).

Unfortunately, though, while the game looks good on paper, on the screen it struggles to show the same sparkle — yet. Advanced progressive meshing techniques help the water to flow naturally, and the environments show the worth of good research well implemented. However, considerably more polish will be required if the game is to realize its full potential. Luckily, with the projected release date more than a year out, there's still plenty of time to make this game shine. — John Leaver

The wide range of boats will include everything from V8 Chevy-powered 150hp jet boats to 50hp mono hulls

Time  
01:06:58

Lap  
1/8

4th

The final game will feature nine locations faithfully re-created from Europe and the U.S.

## MAKING WAVES

As the racecraft skip, bounce, and skim across the water, handling will change dramatically. If this concept is pulled off successfully, it could lead to a unique aspect of gameplay, demanding the constant adjustment of wave conditions. Otherwise, it could amount to a frustrating element of lack.

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# LUNAR<sup>2</sup> ETERNAL BLUE

PlayStation



RP



Machin: PSX Publisher: SEGA  
Genre: RPG # of Players: 1 Release date: 7/2/00

"All right, there was one great game for Sega CD – and now it's on its way to PSX. For those not familiar with Lunar 2, the story takes place 1,000 years after the original Lunar and features the same sort of epic storylines, strategic battles and character-oriented magic that made the original so intriguing. We fully expect this re-release of one of the best classic console RPGs to take the PSX by storm."

— DailyRadar.com



LUNAR 2: Eternal Blue Complete casts the player in the role of Riku, a headstrong adventurer who must travel far and wide to save the world from destruction.



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## One More Reason To Be Very, Very Afraid Of The Dark

It's not a sequel to GoldenEye, it's something much bigger and much, much darker... Starring Joanna Dark,

Perfect Dark contains more levels, more features, and more weapons than even the most optimistic GoldenEye fan could have hoped. The game even includes a pretty amazing story. Perfect Dark also contains different difficulty levels. Perfect Dark is positioned to blow us all away with the ability to do things no one has even thought of on the Nintendo 64. This is guaranteed to be one of the top-selling, most played games on the N64 system! — DailyRadar.com



# PERFECT DARK™



Machine: N64 Publisher: Savant  
Genre: Action # of Players: Multi



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# THE LEGEND OF DRAGOON

PlayStation



Machine: PSX Publisher: SONY  
Genre: RPG # of Players: 1 Release Date: 6/13/00

"Could this be the Final Fantasy killer we've been waiting for?

Legend of the Dragoon is an epic RPG ... everything, from the FMVs to the prerendered backgrounds, is beautiful. Sony has gone above and beyond with incredible art and landscapes that

seem to breathe with life ... don't take our word for it, take a look for yourself." — DailyRadar.com



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# →Milestones

Next Generation's monthly update  
on tomorrow's games

## Baldur's Gate II

→ Interplay and BioWare are gearing up for the September release of this long-awaited 200-hour gorilla. The sequel sports numerous player-suggested refinements, 3D compatibility, support for 800-by-600 resolution, and a spell book that has swollen to around 300 entries.

■ BioWare is adamant that while 3D video support is not vital to the game, it will enable enhanced lighting and spell effects (above)

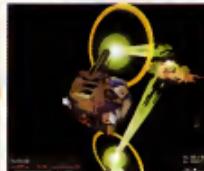


■ The game will be roughly the same length as its predecessors, with fewer, but meatier, side quests

# →Milestones

## ■ PC HOMeworld? CATAclysm

→ Barking Dog's stand-alone Homeworld spin-off boasts 17 missions, and focuses on two new factions: the mining Klith Somtaaw, and the sinister, technorganic Beast. Look for Sierra to publish it by late summer.



■ One of the more macabre aspects of the Beast is the way it builds its resources: It infects and takes over other ships, essentially using the crew members' living flesh to hotwire the craft (above).



■ A new color-by-vertex system enables ships to show damage (above), while the Somtaaw's versatile resource collectors can also be trained to salvage enemies or complete repairs (left).

## ■ PC NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

→ The first game to utilize LithTech's impressive version 2.0 engine, this first-person spy adventure from Monolith puts players in control of the lovely Agent Archer, a "beautiful but deadly" '60s-style secret agent, complete with a wry sense of humor (and, we imagine, go-go boots). The game is heavily influenced by Austin Powers and early Bond films, and will complement traditional FPS action with missions that require *Theft*-like stealth. Fox Interactive hopes to have it on shelves in late 2000.



■ Although it's obvious that many of the game's characters are out to get you (like the Village People wannabe above), if you kill normal civilians (and there are many), you'll fail your mission.



■ As a special operative, Archer will have a few experimental weapons to complement her existing equipment. The "suitcase" below looks handier than a laser-firing Zippo.



■ PC

# COMMAND & CONQUER: RENEGADE



→ This long-awaited 3D action/adventure is due from Electronic Arts and developer Westwood Studios late this year. The game will finally allow players to get a soldier's eye view of the battle between GDI and Nod forces.



■ The single-player game puts the player in the role of a GDI soldier. The game will be completely faithful to the C&C franchise, with the same buildings, panicky civilians, and troops who will still do push-ups to pass the time.

## ■ PLAYSTATION2 GUNSLINGER

→ Currently in the early stages of development by Surreal (creators of Drakan) for a spring 2001 release by Activision, this third-person old-west adventure will offer a branching storyline in which the player can choose to become either a hero or an outlaw. Skills such as gambling, two-handed shooting, and horseback riding will be essential, but players will live or die on their ability to draw quickly.



## ■ PLAYSTATION

# ALIEN: RESURRECTION

→ This title began life with a top-down view, but has evolved into a spooky first-person adventure not unlike the franchise's earlier PlayStation title, *Alien Trilogy*. Expect it to arrive this June from Fox Interactive and developer Argonaut.



■ This game is decidedly suspenseful, and actually feels more like the original *Alien* film than *Resurrection*; however, it shares more of the latter film's pyrotechnics, as evidenced by the explosive screenshots below.



# →Milestones

■ PC

## I'M GOING IN

With the indoor facilities inadequate, the tire burners are back in environments such as one shown below, where you can focus clearly on an enemy thousands of yards away.

Publisher Eidos is aiming squarely at the military-action market with this thinking man's shooter, which is set for a summer 2000 release. Developer Innerloop is using a converted flight simulator engine for the game to maximize draw distance, so players can zoom in on the surface of distant mountains with no loss in resolution.



■ PC, DREAMCAST, PLAYSTATION, NINTENDO 64  
**SYDNEY 2000**

Each location in the game will be modeled from its actual Olympic site, and every country will have unique characters. That's news from the Dreamcast version.



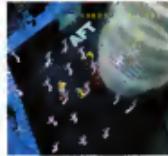
Attention to Detail has earned the honor of developing the official videogame of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Sporting 12 events from diving to skeet shooting, the game will include Olympic mode, in which athletes must train and qualify before reaching the games. It will be released by Eidos this August.

■ PC

## SANITY

Monolith's first adventure title is the ability to fire projectiles or pure burning plasma.

Another teaming of Monolith and Fox Interactive has produced this action-adventure title, which takes place in a sci-fi universe heavily influenced by dream imagery. Players control a psionic agent locked in a war against psychic terrorists, and can shoot fireballs and summon monsters. Test your sanity this fall.



■ PC, DREAMCAST, PLAYSTATION,  
**LEGACY OF KAIN:  
SOUL REAVER II**

In this new title, Raziel will pursue Kain back through time, acquire new spells, and encounter new enemies, such as vampire hunters and demons.



Actually the third game in the series begun by Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain, Crystal Dynamics' Soul Reaver II should arrive this fall, courtesy of Eidos. The game will feature continuous data streaming to eliminate load times, as well as real-time morphing between the spectral realm and the material world.



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Are the Next Generation Consoles

# READY FOR WAR?

The game industry is entering what promises to be one of its most unstable periods ever, as four players battle for the next generation of console dominance. We bring you the classified report.



The console wars are getting more complicated every day, with four next-generation systems (and the PC) vying for your attention — and cash — during the next 18 months. The future isn't muddy only for game players, though: While small companies are used to betting the farm on every project, even the largest publishers are currently uneasy, because they're forced to make next-generation development decisions without the security that the stable PlayStation and Nintendo 64 platforms had offered during the past five years.

So which system is going to win? And which one should you buy (or develop for)? For well-financed consumers, the solution has always been easy — buy every console and you can't go wrong. For those looking for more detail about the next-generation systems, we've provided an in-depth SWOT analysis of each system; that is, a look at each system's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

These aspects will certainly change during the course of the coming console battle (who would have predicted, six months ago, that one of Dreamcast's strengths today would be that it's free?). However, we're confident that our analysis offers the most up-to-date information available, because it's based on hundreds of off- and on-the-record conversations with the top publishers and developers in the business. It's impossible to say what company will win until all the players have released systems, but the following story should give you a good idea of what each company faces, the strengths and opportunities that need to be exploited, and the obstacles that must be overcome to take the ultimate prize — the lion's share of the market.





# Dreamcast

Released in September 1999 in the U.S., Dreamcast was dismissed by many as the little console that couldn't. Its technology was old when the system was released; the Japanese launch was an unqualified failure; and third parties and consumers were

scared away by Sega's dismal performance with Saturn. Someone apparently forgot to tell consumers, though, because the system has gone on to sell two million units in North America. But that was against tired PlayStation and Nintendo 64 hardware. In

the second half of this year, Dreamcast will face its two biggest challenges: Moving beyond hardcore, early-adopter consumers, and facing off against the PlayStation 2 juggernaut.

## Strengths

→ Dreamcast's biggest strength right now is that it's here — and so far it's been a best-case scenario for Sega. There has been a steady progression of great games (*Soul Calibur*, *Crazy Taxi*, *NFL 2K*, and the list goes on); the system continues to sell well; and the company has managed, in the U.S. anyway, to

erase the memory of the horror that was Saturn. And Sega's one-year head start has enabled it to build mind share and market share without much interference from Sony or Nintendo. "We are very optimistic in the U.S. and Europe," says Sega's president, Shioichiro Irimajiri. "Sega of Japan can provide great action and driving games, and Visual Concepts can provide great sports games. It's been very satisfying."

Dreamcast has also proven to be an extremely easy platform for developers. Offered a choice between Dreamcast and PS2, Resident Evil producer Shinji Mikami is frank: "If I didn't have to consider whether it would sell or not, based purely on creating a great game, Dreamcast is a better environment." The results speak for themselves: Dreamcast's best second-generation offerings — such as *Soul Calibur*, *Code Veronica*, and *Dead or Alive 2* — easily equal (and arguably exceed) the

visual quality of early PS2 offerings, such as *Tekken Tag Tournament* and *DOA2*.

Another strength for Dreamcast going forward may be its price. Free Sega's radical free-system rebate offer, even with the binding contract that requires a two-year investment of \$527, will look very enticing at retail. Even at full price, the \$199 (or \$149 by Christmas, if the rumors can be believed) Dreamcast — and its larger, and in many cases better, library — should look pretty appealing next to a PS2 that's expected to retail for \$299.

## Weaknesses

→ The news isn't all good for Sega, and the biggest weakness of the system is its age. While today's Dreamcast games look at least as good as first-generation PlayStation 2 games, there's no guarantee that competitiveness will continue with second-generation PS2 games, or games for newer systems such as X-Box and

Dolphin. Dreamcast looks great now, but will that still be true in 2001 or 2002? Third parties aren't so confident. Says Shigeru Yokoyama, a group general manager at Namco Ltd., "When making PlayStation 2, Sony thought two to three years in advance, but in Sega's case, they only thought a year in advance, so the life span of the hardware will be shorter."

When asked about third-party support, Irimajiri is quick to point out that Dreamcast is missing the support of only two third parties: "EA and Square are the only

two third parties not supporting us." That's true, but because they're arguably the two most important third parties, the support situation is far worse than the numbers indicate. And among many other third parties (notable exceptions include Capcom, Midway, and Eidos), support seems much thinner than for PS2. Though Namco has announced it is supporting Dreamcast in the U.S., it hasn't announced any titles yet, and support from such third parties as Hasbro and THQ has been sparse. Conversations NextGen had with developers at GDC also indicated that, for many devel-

opers, Dreamcast was a third priority behind PS2 and the PC.

Finally, the failed Japanese launch has severely hurt Dreamcast. Not only will it hurt the flow of games from smaller Japanese developers that will help fill in niches between marquee titles, but it may also decrease the commitment of Sega's Japanese investors to a system that is only popular overseas. It also means the overall size of the worldwide market is smaller. Because up to 50% of a game's revenue comes from overseas, this makes Dreamcast development an even dicier proposition for U.S. and European developers.

→ The biggest opportunity for Sega, says Sega of America boss Peter Moore, "is that little thing you plug into on the side of the box. Our biggest opportunity, and our biggest strength, is how we're going to take full advantage of that for the consumer." He's right: Sega is betting the future of Dreamcast on online gaming, and though the risk is huge, the rewards may be, too. Unlike Sony, Sega is launching into games with narrowband capabilities right away (well, in September). For gaming, it may be more than enough; a 14.4K modem is actually fast enough for Quake III if the data doesn't have to take too many hops between machines. With Sega's SegaNet ISP promising low-latency connections, the Dreamcast's included 56K modem should be more than adequate for online gaming. And solutions for DSL and cable modems are coming, says Moore: "We're narrowband ready and broadband prepared." Although Sega is offering online options for PC owners, the company is really targeting the 50% of the country without Internet accounts at home. Giving them free systems and plug-and-play Web and multiplayer gaming

### ■ Shinji Mikami



■ Producer, Resident Evil

**"If I didn't have to consider whether it would sell or not, based purely on creating a great game, Dreamcast is a better environment."**

→ The biggest threat to Dreamcast's chances may be erosion in the already-shaky third-party support. Take Producer Shinji Mikami — although he prefers Dreamcast, he says that "even if you create a great game, the Dreamcast market is so limited, you have to take that into consideration from a business point of view" when deciding whether or not to make a game for the system. Other developers, such as Hasbro, have quietly canned projects for the system. As long as the system continues to perform well in North America, development will continue, but third-party support seems shallow at best. A bad holiday season this year could spell the end of widespread support for the system.

A bad X-mas for Dreamcast is

## Opportunities

access may make Dreamcast the ultimate living room accessory. And once the systems are in homes, the games (both on- and offline) will follow.

The lackluster PlayStation2 launch, and the difficulty of PS2 development, is another opportunity for Sega. "With a team of 15, I can make a Dreamcast game in eight months that does 100,000 units in 60 days," said an executive at a top game publisher. "So why should I devote a team of 30 for two years to PS2 when even Namco has sold only 500,000 Ridge Racer V?" He has a point: Even if PS2 has a bigger installed base, the economy of Dreamcast games may be much stronger than that of PS2 games, especially for smaller developers and sub-AAA titles.

### ■ Quake III



exactly what Sony is planning when it unveils the biggest game-launch marketing

budget for PlayStation2. It may be tough for Dreamcast to stand out, a situation Peter Moore acknowledges. "Obviously our biggest challenge this year will be the onslaught from PlayStation2. To meet it, we'll need to clearly communicate in our marketing the value that Dreamcast offers, as well as the fact that we're offering an Internet solution that Sony can't." Still, Moore isn't worried about the games themselves: "We know what they'll have, and we know what we'll have out there, and we haven't seen anything yet that strikes fear in our hearts." Nintendo

## Threats

executive Hiroshi Imanishi is less optimistic: "Sega is the type of company that has good early sales, but it doesn't have the financial strength to do clever marketing right now, especially when PS2 is in the market."

Finally, although a recent cash infusion from CSK has helped Sega, the company simply cannot afford any bad news. If everything continues to go as well as it has in Europe and North America, the company can remain a solid competitor; however, it will be far less able to tolerate setbacks than the cash-heavy competition that is Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft.



# PlayStation2

While PlayStation2 will certainly be a great game machine, Sony has higher hopes for the system. The company expects it to usher in the age of "computer

entertainment," a catch-all term for games, interactive movies, video and music on demand, and as-yet-undefined (and undiscovered) entertainment

opportunities, which all have one thing in common: You'll use your PS2 to experience them.

## Strengths

→ One of the biggest things going for PlayStation2 is Sony's sheer market presence. Of the 50 or so industry insiders we talked to in the course of researching this story, no one — not even employees of Sega, Microsoft, or Nintendo — expected PS2 to be anything but an unqualified success. That kind of expectation can quickly become a self-fulfilling prophecy: Third parties support the

machine, creating consumer demand; competitors plan their marketing based on a "Sony rules" scenario, and so on. Even with a less-than-stellar

Japanese launch, demand for the system is sure to be huge come fall, and it's hard to imagine any scenario in which PS2 doesn't have a great launch.

Despite the difficulties early developers are having — particularly with anti-aliasing — PS2's technological capabilities remain a huge strength. Are they difficult to exploit? Yes, but as Capcom R&D 2 general manager Keiji Inafune says, "It used to be that the hardware

limited the development of games, but that's no longer the case. Now we can do just about anything ... We've never been able to do that before." Although early software doesn't show it (*"All the developers set the bar low this time,"* says Inafune), every developer we spoke to who has seen the hardware agrees that it can do things that gamers have never seen before. Add in DVD movie support, and PS2 is a very compelling piece of hardware. The last word goes to Namco's Shigeru Yokoyama: *"To be honest, we don't know how much we can do with PS2 yet, but we do know that we're not even close to utilizing*

*all of its capabilities."*

The PlayStation's most important strength may be third-party support: Everyone, it seems, wants to create PS2 games. That alone guarantees that hardcore gamers will need to pick up a PS2. Dreamcast, X-Box, and Dolphin may have great, exclusive titles, as well as a wide range of software, but for now, PS2 appears to have the greatest breadth and depth of forthcoming software. That same breadth and depth helped PSX to succeed against the great arcade conversions on Saturn, and the masterworks of Shigeru Miyamoto on Nintendo 64. Sony is hoping that history will repeat itself here.

## Weaknesses

→ But PlayStation2 is not without weaknesses, and the biggest one is that it is very difficult to develop for. What was the last difficult-to-develop-for system that was successful? The answer is the Atari 2600. All major consoles since then (NES, Genesis, Super NES, and PSX) have been straightforward to program for. The difficulties of harnessing the

power of PS2 are already legend. *"PS2 is harder than Saturn, hands down,"* says Shinji Mikami, referring to Sega's notoriously difficult 32-bit machine.

One problem, adds Keiji Inafune, is that *"there are so many ways to achieve what you want, you really need to know the best method."* And unlike PlayStation, on which you could switch methods halfway through if things went sour, *"With PlayStation2, there may be 20 or 30 methods of doing something, so it is almost impossible to correct*

*the method without trial and error if you have chosen the wrong one,"* says Inafune. One programmer told us his only complaint was that PS2 had no limits. Shigeru Yokoyama agrees: *"We don't know what the limits are ... Our programmers are fearful that they don't know how far they should go," or how much time they should take. Compounding the native difficulty of the system are rumors of buggy development kits, a lack of libraries provided by Sony, and persistent fears that the 4MB VRAM is simply not enough to*

*provide adequate texture at high resolutions.*

Another weakness may be some hubris on the part of Sony. The company is on top and it knows it. It can, and does, drive hard bargains with third parties, and this may drive some to develop for other platforms, if for no other reason than to keep Sony from becoming the only platform holder. *"I don't know anyone who wants Sony to fail,"* said one publishing executive, *"because we have too much invested with them. But I think everyone would like to see another viable competitor."*

# Opportunities

Tekken Tag Tournament



Though Sega is quick to point out that even in three years, broadband will account for only a small fraction of home Internet connections, Sony is willing to bet that what it has planned for its online network could be a killer app for broadband. More than just providing online multiplayer games (although that will be a huge component), Sony is planning to deliver music and movies over its network. The company intends to deliver a PCMCIA hard drive/broadband connection in 2001. Some remain skeptical about putting Sony in charge of a gaming network: "We really have no desire to compete with Sony Computer [over a network]," says Hisashi Suzuki, executive vice

president of SquareSoft. "However, if they run the game servers, they have access to our customers' information, and another company having that kind of information is very scary." However, Sony has done an excellent job with its Station.com website, and it has plenty of movie and music connections. Although no video/music-on-demand system has succeeded yet, if Sony can deliver the 10 million North American sales some analysts predict for the first year, it should have the best chance of succeeding in that business.

The inclusion of a full-featured DVD player is another great opportunity for Sony to open PS2 to a mass audience that is ready to receive postgame "computer entertainment." Also, the presence of the IEEE-1394 (a.k.a. FireWire or i-Link) port, USB ports, and PCMCIA cards show that PS2 is a machine designed with expansion in mind. Helping people take advantage of them for games, computer entertainment, and even productivity applications is a huge opportunity for Sony, and one that it plans to exploit.



Keiji Inafune, Capcom general manager, R&D 2

"It used to be that the hardware limited the development of games, but that's no longer the case. Now we can do just about anything ... We've never been able to do that before."

The power of PlayStation2 doesn't come cheap: By selling the PS2 at \$38,000, Sony is losing, according to the best estimates, about \$200 per unit. The company is counting on software sales in Japan to subsidize hardware prices for America, but if big titles such as Gran Turismo 2000 continue to be delayed, Sony may find itself with some cash flow problems. That's not a big deal in and of itself, but one of the reasons behind Sony Computer Entertainment's success is that it has been able to point to its profits and tell other less dynamic elements of Sony Corporation to leave it alone. If profits fall dramatically, two things may happen: SCE may lose vital internal corporate squabbles (meaning decisions may no longer be made by the people who know the game industry best); and the

Impression of the company's sheer dominance of the sector (one of its biggest strengths, remember) may erode.

A bigger threat comes from the games themselves. The first generation of PS2 titles has been less than inspiring, and the best ones, Ridge Racer V and Tekken Tag, don't look light years ahead of Dreamcast games. "I felt like leaving the PlayStation2 Festival after 30 minutes," says Shinji Mikami.

Others share his opinion. "The graphics are beautiful, but the games aren't interesting," says Nintendo's Imanishi. Though he's certainly not an unbiased source, players and developers agree. Sony should have some amazing titles on display at E3, but if the U.S. launch isn't more exciting than Japan's, the company could see its huge lead in mind share evaporate

Hisashi Suzuki



Executive vice president of SquareSoft

"We really have no desire to compete with Sony Computer [over a network],"

# Threats

overnight. And once a company falls behind, it's difficult to catch up.

The final threat is tied to a weakness: Because PS2 is so difficult to develop for, many developers are simply no longer excited by it. "It's not really that bad," said a programmer at GDC who was porting a major game engine to the system, "but I'm excited to be done and move on to X-Box, because it's going to be so much easier to do stuff." Sure, top teams such as Naughty Dog are squarely in Sony's camp, but given an arguably more powerful, and easier to develop for, system on the horizon, Sony will need to find a way to keep other developers from bolting if it wants to ensure a steady flow of solid games.

# X-Box

Microsoft rocked the game world when word leaked out (in our pages) that it would be releasing a console, and rocked it again when it

showed the machine running at GDC. Now the company's challenge is moving X-Box from prototype to finished product.

## Strengths

When Microsoft officially unveiled X-Box at GDC this year, show attendees were impressed not only with the demos (some of which were coded specifically to one-up Sony's PlayStation 2 demos), but also with the incredibly short time that Bill Gates and Seamus Blackley claimed the demos were created in. By using familiar, off-the-shelf technology — a PIII x86-class processor and nVidia graphics chip — Microsoft has ensured that X-Box will be even easier for programmers to exploit than Dreamcast. ■

I think [the ease of development] will be a huge advantage," says Microsoft's Ed Fries. "Technology doesn't sell consoles; games sell consoles. The easier you can make life for developers, the more attractive your platform will be to them. The more great developers you attract, the more great games will get created."

The technology is not only easy to use, but also top-of-the-line. Even with the release date of X-Box nearly 18 months away, PCs will likely not have caught up with the graphics spec, and the CPU speed is specified only as "above 400MHz," giving Microsoft and Intel room to substitute a faster chip if needed. The 64MB unified memory is very exciting,

because developers can decide how much memory to dedicate to graphics and how much to reserve for the CPU. (In contrast, PS2 has only 4MB VRAM.) And Microsoft is claiming 150 million fully textured, shaded, and anti-aliased polygons per second; that's more than a standard TV can display at 60 FPS, but the system includes support for HDTV resolutions as well. The 8GB hard drive is also an amazing advantage (see the X-Box "Opportunities" section for more information).

And unlike Sony, Microsoft doesn't have to reclaim billions of dollars in R&D and fab costs; everything is more or less "off the shelf," which should enable the company to deliver X-Box at a very competitive price — probably below the retail price of the Pentium CPU alone.

## Weaknesses

Microsoft knows it needs to attract great game developers for X-Box, but its sum total of experience in the console world consists of a version of *Monster Truck Madness* licensed to Take 2, and a somewhat buggy OS for Dreamcast. The reality is that the PC and console game worlds are very different, and experience and success in one doesn't necessarily transfer well to the other. Microsoft can make great

PC games, but there's no evidence that the company truly "gets" console gaming, something it has to nail if it wants to succeed. Still, Microsoft's Fries is confident: "Our strategy is to team up with the very best developers in the world, then give them the time and resources they need to do great work. That won't change for X-Box, but what will change is that we'll be substantially expanding the number of partners we're working with."

Although it has worked with Namco and Konami in the past, Microsoft doesn't have strong relationships with many Japanese

developers. It just announced the formation of a dedicated Japanese X-Box division, but the Japanese market is notoriously tough to crack, and it will take some time before the company can create meaningful relations with the Japanese developers who can make or break a system. And the response from the Japanese developers Next Generation spoke to has been lukewarm: "We're thinking about it," says Namco's Shigeru Yokoyama. (Interestingly enough, the one exception to this, other than Konami, is Square, which is in active negotiations with Microsoft about *Final Fantasy XI*.)

Finally, while the Microsoft name stands for quality in PC games, and even PC game

hardware, it simply isn't cool. In fact, it's actively uncool in many circles, including many of the hardcore early adopters who will help or hurt the system's early buzz. And while Sony pushed the PlayStation brand name when the system launched (saving the Sony logo only for point of purchase to signal quality to parents), early reports suggest that Microsoft will push the system as "Microsoft X-Box," not simply "X-Box." Rick Thompson, vice president of business development for X-Box, disagrees: "You didn't go out to buy an N64, you went out to buy Mario. The challenge for us is to develop great games, and the rest will take care of itself."



■ X-BOX Pre-rendered sample  
Demo, of X-Box's future realtime  
graphics power

## Threats

→ "It's very hard to establish a new platform," Bill Gates admitted to us way back in NG 06/96. And it hasn't gotten any easier in the past four years. Though X-Box sounds great on paper, it's important not to overlook Microsoft's atrocious record for delivering first-generation products. It typically takes Microsoft several iterations of a product to get it right; but in the console business, there is only one chance. X-Box is already launching a year after PlayStation2, so any delays or flaws in the final product could

kill it before it gets out of the gate. Even if the release follows Microsoft's best-case scenario, there simply may not be room in the market for X-Box if PS2 is as successful as Sony expects it to be.

Another threat results from an aforementioned strength: It's so easy to port a PC game to X-Box that the system may become the "PCjr" of the 21st century — a place for crippled versions of PC games. Microsoft execs insist that won't happen ("I don't want Quake or Unreal," quips Rick Thompson, "I want those guys to do something new for X-Box"), but some publishers insist it's

the vision Nintendo had with 64dd.

Although Microsoft's lack of experience as a console platform holder is definitely a weakness, in some ways this is also an opportunity. While the company will evaluate games for quality and content before licensing them, Rick Thompson says it will be done in a unique way: "I look at Nintendo as a parallel universe in terms of licensing. I have nothing but respect for their games, but their business model is a first-party model — it's almost a closed system. On the Sony side, a lot of people who did a good job for Sony on PlayStation are not getting the benefits of a partnership on PlayStation2, and they're wondering what it means to have been there for Sony. So, I think we have some

## opportunities there."

Specifically, third parties can expect lower royalty payments and what Thompson calls a "closed loop" approval process: predictable standards for quality applied across the board, with less emphasis on subjective judgment of a game's content.

Finally, broadband access is as much an opportunity for Microsoft as it is for Sony. "Broadband is wide open, and we could be the guys to figure that out," Thompson says. The system will ship with a modem, and some people may argue that Microsoft's lack of its own music business or movie studio actually gives it a leg up on forming partnerships for video and music on demand.



part of Microsoft's X-Box pitch. "Yeah, they were here with their 'you can do a port in two hours' speech," one publisher told us in March.

Finally, Microsoft needs to ensure that X-Box stands on its own, and without a strong first-party presence, that may be tough. Although the company tries to turn lemons into lemonade ("So what if our first party isn't super-strong; it means a great

"It's very hard to establish a new platform,"

opportunity for our third-party partners"), the reality is that Microsoft needs to start creating great first-party console content now — and a solid mascot wouldn't hurt — if it wants X-Box to stand out in fall 2001.

# Dolphin

It's hard to imagine a system with a new *Mario* game not selling, but will Nintendo be able to move beyond *Dolphin* being just a *Mario* machine?

## Strengths

→ Nintendo's biggest strength is Shigeru Miyamoto. The games he and his teams create ensure that *Dolphin* (which is scheduled for release in 2001) will at least sell to every hardcore player in America. Nintendo realizes this, and is willing to hold off on releasing the system until Miyamoto is ready. **"Internally both systems are ready."** Nintendo's Hiroshi Imanishi says of *Dolphin* and *Game Boy Advance*, "but always with Nintendo, the hardware is done, but the software is not. Miyamoto always says, 'Oh, we're not ready yet.'"

Nintendo's marketing genius is also *Dolphin's* strength: While everyone else is attempting to make the next set-top box, Nintendo is content to make an inexpensive game player aimed at children. **"We have very limited know-how and experience,"** says Imanishi modestly. **"We don't have the capacity to diversify."** Perhaps he should have said desire instead of capacity — Nintendo knows its market, and, if history is any judge, will successfully exploit it. Even in Japan, where N64 is technically a failure, *Kirby 64* sold more copies in two weeks than *Ridge Racer V* did in six.

## Weaknesses

→ At the same time, Nintendo doesn't have the world-dominating cachet it did ten years ago (except in handhelds). And it is quite possible that the younger generation of game players is not as enamored of *Mario*, *Zelda*, and *Donkey Kong* as their older brothers were on NES and Super NES. *Pokemon* has the feel of a fad (demand is already drying up in Japan), and though the well may not run dry for *Mario* or *Zelda* on *Dolphin*,

it's safe to say that it may not be as deep.

Nintendo has never courted third parties, but without them the system's talent pool can become very shallow — witness the scarcity of quality N64 titles as the perfect example. Still, it's obvious Nintendo doesn't mind how many titles it puts out. **"It's interesting,"** Imanishi says. **"Nintendo itself sells the same amount of software in a year regardless of how many titles we put out. If one title is selling well, the others just shrink."**

But the kids may mind, especially if they felt burned on N64 by the lack of quality titles.

## Opportunities

→ Nintendo's biggest opportunity is to own the younger portion of the market, while its competitors fight it out over being the next set-top box. It's one thing for

Sony to introduce *Spyro the Dragon* when it's trying to broaden the appeal

of PlayStation, but with PlayStation2, the company will need to spend a year or more targeting hardcore players. This gives Nintendo a chance to solidify its younger user base.

Nintendo's deal with

Matsushita could be a Trojan horse: If Panasonic puts, for free, *Dolphin* technology into every DVD player it makes (and maybe bundles a copy of *Mario Dolphin* with it), Nintendo could quietly become a major player in the war for the living room. And if the games-only system is priced as a toy, rather than a technology (below, say \$100), *Dolphin* may find mass-market success faster than its broadband-enabled competitors.

## Threats

→ Technology has never been Nintendo's strong point, and given the revolutionary leaps taken by Sony and Microsoft, Nintendo may find itself launching last with technology that looks the worst. Though the

company's focus has always been kids, it has made significant inroads into older markets. But unless *Dolphin* impresses —

and we have only Nintendo's vague promise that it will be "better" than PS2 — it may find it tough to crack anything other than the adolescent market.



■ General affairs manager of Nintendo Company, Ltd.

**"Internally both systems are ready,"**



■ **Unreal Tournament**

## Weaknesses

→ Even though PC prices are dropping every day, a good gaming system still costs around \$3,000, whether you build it yourself or buy it premade. That's a lot of cash, and a huge segment of the population will simply never be able to afford a well-appointed gaming PC.

Without any coordinated market development, the PC

world suffers from too many products, and too much bad product. Shelves are getting more crowded, and it is harder for new, innovative products to stand out. "If it's not a sequel, it really doesn't have much chance," an Electronics Boutique store manager told Next Generation at GDC. This unfortunate reality is driving many talented developers away from the PC, especially when they consider that a moderate PC hit generally sells only about a tenth of the number of units a moderate console hit does.

## Threats

→ A threat to the PC's ubiquity may come from consoles themselves. With the possible exception of Dolphin, all the consoles will have the ability to browse the Web and send email by the next holiday season. This may have an overall negative

effect on the PC market if people decide that a console is enough of a PC for them.

More threatening is this: For years Microsoft has acted as the de facto platform holder for PC. With X-Box now occupying its attention, Microsoft has much less reason to evangelize the PC as a platform.

— author **Chris Chaffin** is editor-at-large for NextGen. Interviews and photos from Japan by **Steve Kent**

# PC

The PC is the oldest game "platform" around. But without any dedicated marketing support, can it remain viable for hardcore gamers?

## Strengths

→ The PC is an open platform. Anyone can develop for it. More than anything else, this should guarantee that there will always be someone, somewhere, creating the next big thing for the PC for free, without any oversight from a platform-holding "big brother."

Also, the PC's interface and higher-resolution monitor make the system ideal for sophisticated games that simply can't be played on a console. Even if you hooked up a keyboard and mouse to your game console

for playing Unreal Tournament, where would you put them? And a high-res display, as well as a mouse, is required for realtime strategy games. The bottom line is that two of the most popular genres today — first-person action games and realtime strategy — simply can't be played as effectively on a console as on a PC.

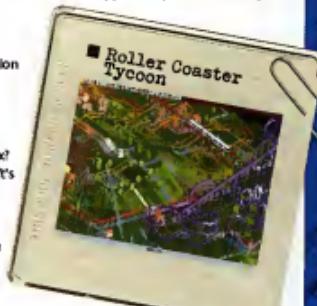
Finally, the rapid innovation in hardware on the PC means that although consoles may have a temporary leg up at the start of each generation, players looking for the maximum level of power will always look to the PC. This means that many cutting-edge innovations, such as speech recognition and true force feedback, will continue to appear first on the PC.

## Opportunities

→ The biggest opportunity for the PC as a game platform is its near-total ubiquity. Nearly 50% of U.S. households own a PC, and though these are not all gaming-class machines, the

installed base of gaming-level PCs will only grow as power increases and cost decreases.

Already titles such as *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and *Roller Coaster Tycoon* have shown that there is a huge, nontraditional audience willing to buy games. Tapping into this audience presents a great opportunity for PC developers.





Konoko from Oni  
by Bungie



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# →Finals

Always covering the latest and greatest, NextGen presents the first regular PS2 reviews in the U.S. — go ahead, drool



PlayStation2

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PlayStation2

## Tekken Tag Tournament

Publisher: Namco   Developer: Namco

It looks amazing, but haven't we played this before?

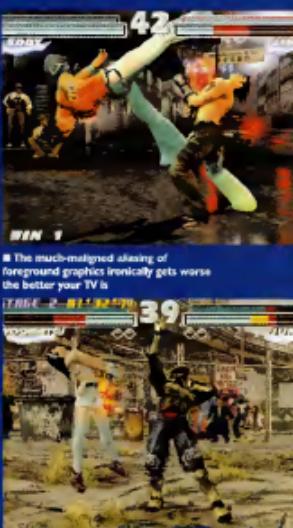
 **Tekken Tag Tournament** is always going to suffer from the harsh gaze of post-launch scrutiny, and given the microscopic attention it's receiving, it comes out very well. As the second most important title in Japan's PS2 launch phase, it will be judged at a higher standard than most — ironic, given that launch games have historically sucked. Namco, as

usual, has bucked the trend.

Players might be expecting some kind of super sequel to the last domestic Tekken product, *Tekken 3*. They might be expecting new characters, new moves, and new scenarios. Sadly, that's not the case. As it was in the arcade, *Tekken Tag Tournament* is basically an updated, tweaked, and prettified version of *Tekken 3* — almost

exactly the same lineup of characters, moves, and gameplay. The big difference, of course, is the Tag feature. It's possible, at any time, with the tap of a key, to tag in a second fighter. Extra RAM on the arcade version made this feature possible, but on PS2, the game is enhanced in lots of other departments, too.

Graphically, it's something of a tour de force. The character



The much-maligned shading of foreground graphics ironically gets worse the better your TV is

STAGE 1 39



design, animation, and fluidity are superb — perhaps the characters are not as charismatic as *Soul Calibur*'s heroes, but they are beautifully rendered nonetheless. The background art varies wildly, from ordinary to jaw-dropping, and neat foreground effects, like convincing grass or reflective floors, add atmosphere. Perhaps more interesting is the addition



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## The Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at *Next Generation* will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

### ★★★★★ Revolutionary

### ★★★★★ Excellent

### ★★★★★ Good

### ★★★★★ Fair

### ★★★★★ Bad

● Denotes a review of a Japanese product

## DEAD ON ARRIVAL

One unexpected problem that Tekken runs smack into is the simultaneous availability of Tekken's Dead or Alive 2. Namco has often butted heads with the likes of Capcom and Sega while fighting for fighting game supremacy, but for a comparative mismatch like Tekko to show up with a Tekken-based game come as a nasty shock. And Tekken has already won the goods. Most of the level arenas are being reused from those found in Tekken, and while DOA2's character design is an obvious derivative of Virtua Fighter's, the technology the game presents is easily equal to Tekken 3's. Tekko's sudden momentum could make it a force to be reckoned with in this next generation race.

of 3D animated characters in the backgrounds — a far cry from the chicken-choking crowds of Street Fighter. There are some problems, though — the oft-mentioned jaggies (thanks to a lack of anti-aliasing) and the occasionally distracting parallax problems with the backdrops.

Musically, this is easily the best Tekken yet, with a nice mix of punchy techno and suitably overdramatic orchestral stuff. The sound effects are clean and pleasing and give the clear impression that this game has been slaved over, rather than rushed out in time for launch. The same goes for the game's interface, which is every bit as simple to navigate as Tekken 3's.

Gameplay is the patented Tekken mixture of combos, grabs, counters, and special



■ The characters are curvier and more complex than the arcade version's moves. The Tag feature is cool, and adds a nice level of strategy — you have to be careful about how you manage your health meter. A cute bowling game replaces Tekken (volley) Ball from Tekken 3, and there are hidden characters, costumes, and gallery options.

The huge assortment of characters — 39 at last count — means plenty of variety and ways to complete the game. Opening up new characters is fun, but as



■ As ever, this iteration of Tekken requires mastery of preset combos and counters

before, many of these are modifications of existing heroes. But like Soul Calibur, the repetition is absorbing rather than irritating. Most players will actually take the time to complete the game with every character — not just to see the ending sequences, but to open up new characters. And two-player combat never gets old.

Tekken Tag Tournament is virtually flawless, but it suffers in comparison to its peers. DOA2 looks every bit as good, if not better. Even the Dreamcast version of Soul Calibur looks technically comparable, and Sega fans are rejoicing in Usenet threads about PS2's apparent lack of Dreamcast-crushing features.

— Frank O'Connor

■ The blades of grass in the foreground add a convincing element of 3D



## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** The only thing preventing Tekken Tag from receiving a perfect score is its lack of innovation — it's basically a prettier Tekken 3. However, that still makes it the best Tekken yet.



■ Note that the PS2 version has higher polygon counts, sharper textures, additional lighting effects — and really, really jagged images.

→ One of the best fighting games of all time (NG 04/00) is now available for both next generation console systems. So for the first time, we can directly compare both the PS2 and Dreamcast versions, and the result is interesting and instructive.

Just to get this out of the way as far as gameplay is concerned, DOA2 is equally

fantastic on both systems. The control is snappy and fluid, the selection of moves is generous, the frame rate is rock solid, and the character designs remain, well, very appealing. That said, the difference between the two versions is almost immediately apparent — although, surprisingly, not entirely to the advantage of PS2.

The PS2 version has many

■ PlayStation2

# Dead or Alive 2

■ Publisher: Teamo ■ Developer: Tecmo

Better, or just different?



■ When you get in close, though, it sure does look mighty tasty, doesn't it?

features the Dreamcast doesn't, notably additional character costumes; new moves, and new arenas (and each new arena also has an additional, deeper lower level to throw characters down into). There are also some extra lighting and environmental effects (wind, blowing sand), plus a few micelaneous touches here and there.

However, while we appreciate the extra arenas and costumes, we can't help but think that these additions, along with a couple minor things like animated characters on the selection screen, are only on the PS2 version because it had three extra months in development. Yes, the PS2 version sports higher-polygon models and sharper textures, but it's also plagued by a complete lack of anti-aliasing. The jaggedness not only mars DOA2's inarguable beauty, but

it's also extremely distracting. Worse, the net result of all the added lighting effects is that everything is too brightly lit in many arenas, to the point where every surface is washed out in the same uniform, golden glow.

In some ways, DOA2 for PS2 feels like a more finished version of the Dreamcast version from a few months back. In others, it feels as if extra technology was slapped on to no effect, or even to bad effect. — Jeff Lundgren

*NextGen* ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** This is a tremendous game and a must-have,

but if you can choose between the two versions, PS2 enjoys an edge thanks to all the extras — just get used to squinting at the too-bright lights and nasty jaggies.

■ PlayStation2

# Driving Emotion Type-S

■ Publisher: Square ■ Developer: Escape

The emotion's right, but the motion's all wrong



■ The in-car perspective is easily the most true-to-life ever witnessed in a videogame, and offers a glimpse of the genre's future.

→ While the pairing of Square and PS2 will most certainly result in many glorious moments for gamers and gamers, their first offering — a sports car concept racer — will not be

one of them.

Complete with eerily realistic head bobbing and swaying, motion blur, dynamic lighting, and even interior reflections on the windshield, the game's hyperrealistic in-

car viewpoint should be seen, if just to get an idea of what's technologically feasible in the genre on PS2. On the other hand, the environments themselves are remarkably bland, and the car models are a big disappointment compared to Ridge Racer V's and Gran Turismo 2000's. Load times are downright abysmal; you'll stare at the prerace loading screen for a good 60 seconds while your competitors are displayed, one by one, v-e-r-y slowly.

Control-wise, this is clearly a game to be tamed, not played. Specifically, there is a discernible "dead zone" in steering in which the cars don't immediately react to movement of the analog stick. This creates a tendency to oversteer, and in turn makes it nigh impossible to properly compensate once



■ Driving Emotion Type-S is the first PS2 racer to feature licensed sports cars, including models from Toyota, Nissan, Honda, Mitsubishi, Subaru, Alpine Romeo, Parsons, and Ferrari.

you do, resulting in a constant tug of war on the analog stick that's nerve-wracking, to say the least.

It's not that you can't eventually tame the controls and win races; it's just that few, if any players will have the patience to hold out that long — and if you can, the rewards are few. There are

no series to compete in, or season mode, and only four divisions of difficulty for each track, three of which must be unlocked. You can unlock new cars by placing first in each race, but that's a mixed blessing in a game where mastering a sub-compact is a truly Sisyphian task. — Randy Nelson

**NextGen** ★☆☆☆☆

**Bottom Line:** A pure concept racer that shows brief glimpses of technical brilliance, but is thoroughly botched by horribly awkward control and a dissatisfaction lack of structure.

■ Max is armed to the teeth, carrying an 'Uzi' in each of his four arms

■ Dreamcast

# MDK2

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: BioWare

## So, some things are worth waiting for

 Once upon a time, MDK was the "next big thing" from Dave Perry's posse at Shiny. The game, which was Shiny's first foray into the 3D game world, was praised for its distinct art direction and its gameplay — a unique mix of action and stealth. Its sequel, MDK2, exceeds the original in almost every respect, despite the fact that it was not developed by Shiny, but by BioWare, a company most famous for making hardcore RPGs.

So how did the developer of Baldur's Gate make an action-adventure game on Dreamcast? It took MDK's successful model and

extended it by adding two new characters, each with completely distinct playing styles. You begin in the body of Kurt Heitic, the hero of the first MDK. Kurt wears a Coil Suit, complete with armor, a parachute, and a hummingbird-shaped sniper helmet. Other levels are played as Max, a four-armed robot dog with a jetpack, or as Dr. Hawkins, a scientist with the ability to combine found objects into tools and weapons.

Kurt's levels are similar to those in the first MDK, requiring lots of dodging and sniping. Max's levels are all about blasting through hordes of enemies, while Hawkins' levels require more problem-solving skills than quick reflexes. The mix of styles works remarkably well, providing a constantly shifting change of pace.

MDK2 also improves on MDK's visuals, with more colors, more gaudy architecture, and, thanks to Dreamcast, a silky smooth frame rate. Most levels feature wide-open rooms with twisting, Gaudiesque spires, vast floating platforms, and funny little



■ Kurt uses sniper vision to get out of various scrapes

### THE HISTORY OF TOAST

Dr. Hawkins' main weapon is an atomic toaster, which fires radioactive toast. This invention wouldn't have been possible if it weren't for the Egyptians, who discovered how to make leavened bread by kneading bread dough with their feet. Mmm... yummy.

touches, like a gallery of hecklers who make fun of you when you miss a jump.

The game has a few downfalls, like rough player models, an annoying

sparseness of save points, some pretty lame jokes, and a few maddening puzzles. But none of these faults were enough to keep us away for long.

— Matt Sammons

### NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** A beautiful, action-packed game with constantly changing gameplay. Not to be missed.



■ Dr. Hawkins carefully ponders his next move

# →Finals

## Tech Romancer

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom



■ Giant fighting robots! Who-hoo Yeah, action!

Capcom should rightly serve up some crackers with Tech Romancer's cheese. A straightforward 3D brawler, Romancer offers anime-style combat with huge robots and the kind of oft-beat gongs on that are plucked right from Japanese airwaves.

The game serves up a good crop of nicely rendered mechs, from the goofy patchwork Bolon to the pretty (and very pink) Diana. It, and each robot can perform its own unique strikes, throws, dashes, and long-range attacks. Combat plays out in fine cartoon fashion: the robots' pilots bleat out bits of dialogue and the camera goes mad with dramatic cuts, pans, and zooms. Explosions border on distracting, and there's a distinct sense that

maybe, just maybe, someone went a little overboard. Tech Romancer seems to emphasize flashy, 1,000-misses-at-a-time type of attacks.

Standard anime melodrama applies, and the translation transcends goofiness. Unlockable features and VMU mini-games do add to the replay value, but ultimately the cheddar tang may be too much for the hardened gamer to bear. — Greg Orlando

**NextGen** ★★★☆☆

**Bottom Line:** It's not often when we get to step into our favorite anime and beat some metal ass. Now if only the fighting were as inspired as the off-the-wall anime plot....

## Time Stalkers

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Climax



■ Oh, sure, it looks nice, but Time Stalkers' gameplay and most of its characters aren't as engaging as they appear

Time Stalkers was supposed to be the RPG that Dreamcast owners had all been waiting for. Well, it looks as though they're going to have to wait a bit longer. Don't get us wrong, Time Stalkers has a lot going for it.

The graphics are quite nice, with a lot of variety and a few cool characters. In fact, it's got just about everything you'd expect in a modern console RPG.

Which, in a way, is the problem. The story is generic fantasy (you're a hero transported to an alternate world, where you have to defeat an evil force with the help of characters you meet along the way, yada yada yada), with few quirks or points of interest to set it apart. The magic and combat system is somewhat

convoluted, and although the dungeons are randomly generated, this results in layouts that are pretty simple and, for the most part, kind of boring. There's very little here you haven't seen before.

About the only new element is a series of Monster Rancher-style minigames (seven in all) played out using the Dreamcast VMU. However, these are also somewhat generic for this kind of game, and add very little overall. — Jeff Lundigan

**NextGen** ★★★☆☆

**Bottom Line:** It ain't bad, but the Dreamcast RPG audience needs more than this generic fix.

## Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Core



■ Within Lara? Unless you're a Croft completist, there's really no reason to buy *Lara Croft: The Last Revelation* for Dreamcast

*The Last Revelation* is a travesty: a textbook example of what happens when no time or care is taken with a port. It was shoveled onto Dreamcast solely to wring a few extra bucks out of the franchise, and it shows

We reviewed the PlayStation version in **NG 02/00**, so there's no point in commenting on the overall design again (in brief: it's not bad, but seems rushed, and the series is starting to feel old). Instead, take a look at what the Dreamcast version has to offer; which is, in a word, very little.

Given the game is running under WindowsCE, it appears to be the PC version of the game engine, using (mildly) enhanced PSX textures. The game's not

hideous, but despite being in highres it isn't very pretty, either, and the technical and design problems of previous versions haven't been fixed. There's still abundant clipping, no way to skip the training level, and after the game play it's to offer, which is, in a word, very little.

Worse, unique to this version is an uneven frame rate that often slows to a crawl, despite the modest polygon count. There's just no excuse for this. — Jeff Lundigan

**NextGen** ★★★☆☆

**Bottom Line:** It was a borderline game to begin with. Avoid this version like the plague.

■ Dreamcast

## Sword of the Berserk: Guts' Rage

■ Platform: Eidos ■ Developer: Yuke's

The only thing longer than his sword ... is his cut scenes



■ That's a very big sword, and the ludicrous amount of blood is chuckle-worthy, but the game itself needs more depth

→ If there's one good thing you can say about *Sword of the Berserk* (and there are actually a few), it's that after playing, you'll find it very, very hard to go back and look at a PlayStation title (or even certain other Dreamcast titles) without cringing. It is, in a word, gorgeous. The characters are especially well done, with a wealth of detail and even quite subtle shifts in facial expression at times (backed up by voice acting that is, on the whole, very nice).

The problem is that the gameplay never quite reaches the standard of the graphics. At its heart, this is a 3D beat-'em-up not unlike, say, *Zombie Revenge*. What sets it apart from others of its ilk is that the hero, Gatsu, is armed with a huge, six-foot sword that chops enemies to bits in a satisfying splatter of gore. Lots of gore. Gallons and gallons of gore.

For a while, butchering enemies is great fun, but as with any beat-'em-up, the action grows repetitive, and while each new wave of



■ The graphics are among the best to hit the system

enemies often looks more impressive than the last, the process of beating them down gets a bit weary. There are other smaller problems, such as camera angles that are dramatic but not always useful, or Gatsu's getting into a space too narrow for him to swing that huge blade without hitting the walls.

Perhaps the most damning thing to the game, however, is that there's just not enough game. For every 5 or 10 minutes of action, you have to endure 10 or 15 minutes of cut scenes. Which wouldn't be bad if the story made any sense (something about a virus that causes mutations, with which Gatsu, um, companion is infected), but it never quite comes together coherently. — Jeff Lundigan

**NextGen** ★★★☆☆

**Bottom Line:** It controls reasonably well and looks fantastic — you'll get your money's worth — but the gameplay design is far from perfect, and there's too much exposition for the amount of action.



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# Nintendo 64 →Finals

■ You gotta hate a point-blank hit in the face



■ Nintendo 64

## Perfect Dark

■ Publisher: Nintendo of America ■ Developer: Rare

Perfectly delicious



■ The truly malicious can hit 'em while they're down



■ Nice blood splatters. This ain't no kiddie Nintendo game



■ Ms. Joanna Dark, female hero and slayer of evil



Rare's pseudo-follow-up to its previous hit *GoldenEye 007* sheds the James Bond license, and instead opts for a dark, futuristic environment with a sexy, dangerous lead character known as Joanna Dark. Joanna's task is to uncover the mysteries of the global dataDyno Corporation, which not only involves lots of shooting and killing, but extra-terrestrial beings and insidiously evil plots as well.

This game is packed full of features. It contains an epic story tying the missions to one another, an entire arsenal of weapons Joanna can pick up, devious puzzles she must solve, and some sneaky enemies. And that's only in the single-player adventure. The game also has some of the most robust console

multiplayer modes we've ever encountered; players can compete against three of their buddies, and even add as many as eight computer-controlled "simulants" to the game. Of course, the game requires the Expansion Pak to pull this off, and the frame rates will suffer for the processing hit.

The multiplayer functions aren't just about deathmatching, however. The game also lets players go through the game in cooperative mode, in which players work together to get the job done. The really cool mode, however, is Counter-Operative. Players go head-to-head in a mission, with one player taking on Joanna Dark's role as the infiltrator, and the second player the body of an enemy character who is attempting to stop her at



■ Lasers can't stop an agent like Ms. Dark

all costs. The player trying to stop Joanna can run by guards and wake them up with a good smack to head so they'll hunt Joanna, or the player can go after her himself. Of course, the opposing player can be killed much more easily than Joanna can, in which case the player just jumps into the body of another guard.

The gameplay is slick — the controls are fully configurable and very tight, and even the missions go beyond the typical "infiltrate and kill" scenarios. Varying difficulty levels open up different mission objectives. And some of Joanna's tools are just plain cool.

Rare has always been known to push the graphics of the N64, and given the limitations of the cartridge format on this aging system, it's done it again, with reflections and colored lighting.

lens flare, and enough texture variety to keep each level fresh. Levels range from an office building with standard walls, to large outdoor vistas, to dark caverns filled with extraterrestrial menaces.

If the game has any faults, it's solely in the frame rates. Perfect Dark supports the Expansion Pak for high-resolution graphics, but this definitely slows it down. In fact, you should probably leave it in low-res mode — in most cases, you won't even be able to tell the difference graphically. The frame rates are particularly bad in multiplayer: Four players on the screen slows the game quite a bit, especially if some Simulants are thrown in. However, the slow rates don't make it unplayable, and to fix the jittery view, you can just reduce the number of Simulants. — Michael Wolf

## THE GAME BOY CAMERA CONTROVERSY

When Nintendo started showing Perfect Dark, one of the big features it hyped was the ability of players to take a portrait with the Game Boy Camera and use the Tension Pak (bundled with *Pokémon Stadium*) to import the picture onto the face of a character in the game. However, months before the release, Nintendo announced that the feature had been removed from the game. At first, the reason given was that all of the hardware was then being developed, that simply couldn't get it to work properly, and it was decided that it wasn't worth the time and effort it would take. Later, Rare announced that it was a political move rather than technical — Rare didn't want to lend any credence to the validity of claims regarding violence in video games. Either way, the feature was removed, and, we suspect, Rare felt better knowing that there was no question regarding its technical prowess.



■ When players get hit, their view gets jumbled



■ Night vision is oh-so handy



■ The remote camera will let Joanna see things in areas she can't access



■ Perfect Dark contains many multiplayer options, but of course has deathmatch



■ Not all ETs are friendly

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** Without a doubt, *Perfect Dark* is an extremely worthy follow-up to *GoldenEye*. It might not hold up to some of the better first-person shooters on the PC, like *Unreal Tournament* or *Thief II*, but it's just about everything the hype said it would be.

# PlayStation →Finals



## MediEvil II

■ Platform: PlayStation  
■ Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: Sony



■ Nothing new or outstanding, but MediEvil II is as "mostly harmless" as its predecessor

This sequel to the dark, Tim Burton-esque MediEvil puts you in control of the undead Sir Daniel Fortesque, and keeps much of the original's tongue-in-skull humor. Mainly you run around a Spore-the Dragon-type environment, thrashing zombies, demons, animated suits of armor and other creatures (sort of like Buffy the Vampire Slayer; only without the hot chicks).

The 3D realm is fraught with obstacles and booby traps,

standard lock and key puzzles, and various weapons. Although the minor problems with collision detection have been improved from the first MediEvil, the developers could have learned a few things from another action/adventure/RPG that came out when the original was released, namely Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.

MediEvil II could have been improved greatly if it featured a targeting system similar to that found in Zelda, instead of only a glowing green post that darts around the screen indicating enemies. The control is a touch loose; the camera work could have been improved, and, much like the first MediEvil, the technology is less than impressive. However, it's still oddly fun. — Doug Freeman

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** Like a Hollywood film that opens one week and hits video the next, MediEvil II is a formulaic and agreeable way to pass the time.

## Speed Punks

■ Platform: PlayStation  
■ Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: FunCom



■ Look! Look! The rejects from Crash Team Racing decided to make their own game!

The success of Crash Team Racing was bound to inspire a bunch of half-heeled clones. We just didn't think we'd see one this quickly or that Sony itself would be leading the pack.

Speed Punks is the perfect example of a "me too" title. The game has an over-cute opening R&B, a pseudo-techno soundtrack, and a decent selection of quirky characters. The obligatory secret characters are also in there, and the game features all of the requisite

racing modes, including a four-player split-screen contest.

Despite these features, Speed Punks simply isn't much fun. Characters look as if they're some marketing executive's idea of "cool," and the control scheme is atrocious. You're supposed to be driving karts, yet they have the turning radius of a Buick without power steering. The entire game plays as if you are racing across an ice field. On a winter track this would work, but not when you're racing through the jungle.

Even the ability to support a four-player contest isn't worth much when the game behind it is so mediocre.

It is possible to master the quirky controls, but you shouldn't bother — winning is more work than fun. Looking for a follow-up to CTR? Look elsewhere. — Adam Pavlak

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** A copycat game that isn't worth your time.

■ PlayStation

# Front Mission 3

■ Publisher: Square EA ■ Developer: SquareSoft

The game that dares answer the question, "What is a Wanzer?"



■ Front Mission 3 plays a lot like Final Fantasy Tactics — only with mechs

## → To call Front Mission 3

an RPG would be a misnomer. While the game does score RPG elements, it is a combat strategy game at heart — and a pretty good one at that. You and your opponents command armies of "Wanzers," large mech-style bodyguards loaded to the teeth with weapons.

Combat is turn-based and occurs on a grid, similar to classic board games. Each Wanzer has a certain number of movement points, used for both movement and weapon fire. Use too many movement points and you won't be able to counter when your opponent attacks. The battlefield itself is rendered in 3D, and you can rotate the field in any direction in order to get a better view during fighting — especially around airborne enemies.

You can customize your Wanzers before battle in an attempt to build the perfect fighting machine, choosing from a wide variety of body styles, weapons, and armor; you are limited only by



■ It turns out you can use the word "Wanzer" in mixed company

available space and funds. This level of customization is a nice touch because it allows for some unique fighting combinations.

In addition to the combat, Front Mission 3 also features an engaging storyline, which begins with a mysterious explosion at a military base. Depending on

your actions and funds, this game follows one of two major plotlines, but the stories don't intertwine so you'll have to play through a second time to truly beat the game. All in all, there's quite a bit to like here if you're looking for a fun, turn-based strategy game. — Adam Pavlak

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** A solid game with some engaging RPG elements. Worth your time if you find the idea of realtime strategy exhausting.

RISK

2



Besides being beautifully rendered, bosses are usually huge, and often vulnerable only to specifically enhanced weapons or attacks.

■ PlayStation

# Vagrant Story

■ Publisher: Square EA ■ Developer: SquareSoft

## En Vagrante Delicto



■ Spell effects and special attacks often produce fireworks that block out the combatants themselves

### FIFTY WAYS TO BEAT YOUR MONSTER

Vagrant Story's most innovative feature is its staggeringly complex battle system. When attacking an enemy, you're presented with a lit of the creature's body parts, your odds of striking each part, and how much damage it's likely to result from your attack. Adding to this, each limb, weapon, and piece of armor has an affinity versus elemental alignment (fire, water, air, etc.), enemy type (human, beast, undead, etc.), and weapon type (blunt, piercing, etc.). You can daily chain special attacks, learn defensive counters, and even disassemble weapons and armor for greater effectiveness. There's also a magic system and much more, but you get the idea — there's a lot here.



Square EA continues to refine and push the limits of the modern RPG with *Vagrant Story*, combining lush graphics and wonderful cinematic cut scenes with one of the most customizable battle systems ever seen on a console.

The game's main character is Ashley Riot, a sort of medieval Navy SEAL sent to investigate the Muilenkump, a vampirish religious sect who have taken shelter in a haunted underground city. The complex story involves characters whose motives and connections to one another are revealed through dynamic, well-directed cut scenes.

Graphically, the game sparkles, with large, well-articulated characters and richly detailed, dynamically lit environments. The camera can be rotated completely around the playfield, which is crucial since trees, boulders, and other elements have an annoying habit of blocking your vision.

Ironically, Vagrant Story's greatest strength is also its weakness. The com-

bat system is so intricately designed and deep that many players will unwittingly enter battle improperly equipped, a serious problem when bosses often can only be defeated by a specific item or skill. Also, this focus comes at the expense of plot development; the cut scenes driving the story are often separated by hours of wading through linear dungeons, killing everything you encounter. Again, these can be either strengths or weaknesses — just be aware that this is a tightly focused dungeon crawl, and a very good one. — Eric Bratcher



■ When you initiate an attack, you're presented with various information and options about how to make it effective

### ENextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** *Vagrant Story* moves slowly but with a compelling plot, great graphics, and a groundbreaking combat system; it rewards those with the patience to master its intricacies.

# PC Finals

From the third-person perspective, it can be difficult to position your cross-hairs (note the red reticle) on distant enemies.



■ PC

# Messiah

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: Shiny

## Doing an angry god's work



We first previewed Messiah back in NG 33, but we're finally reviewing it here in the 66th issue. That means Messiah is half as old as NextGen — we just wish it were half as fun.

The basic premise of Messiah is excellent. The game is set in a



■ Our pudgy savior

### RT-DAT?

Like Messiah itself, Shiny's RT-DAT (realtime deformation and tessellation) rendering system is a good idea that doesn't quite work. The deformation allows textures to stretch and makes characters seem more fluid. But the tessellation, which changes a model's poly count on the fly, made the characters seem like lumpy bags with moving parts inside.

decrepit future world, and God has gotten tired of Earth's sinners, so he sends an angel to clean things up. As Bob the cherub, you can possess up to 20 different characters, each with unique abilities. However, most of the characters are quite hostile towards Bob, so simply hopping out of your current "partner" will likely cause the ex-host to turn and gun you down. So, you have to think about somehow ditching your host before depossessing them (for example, by jumping over a balcony and breaking their legs), a truly unique dilemma in videogames.

Messiah also boasts outstanding combat AI. When called to battle, enemy forces will work together, using obstacles to their strategic benefit. If a cop is caught unarmed, he will run to



■ Victoria's Secret's exciting new fall line



■ Sometimes those puny humans come in handy

pick up a weapon rather than flee the room. The enemies are so good, however, that using the awkward, third-person controls can sometimes be frustrating.

But despite some ingenious features, much of Messiah is surprisingly routine. You have to move from switch to switch to unlock doors, or flutter from platform to platform to advance through the dark streets. None of the puzzles are particularly clever, and can usually be resolved by simply finding the right person with the authority to flip the

switch, and jumping into their body. The action scenes can be engrossing, but much of the game is bogged down with busywork.

While there is some fun in Messiah, the game is over too quickly. There are only five "stages," but they're surprisingly small and visually repetitive (by the time you read this, there will undoubtedly be at least one patch for this still-not-quite-finished title). There are a couple of good ideas in Messiah, but like Bob's underdeveloped wings, they aren't enough to get him off the ground.

— Jim Preston

### NextGen ★★★★

**Bottom Line:** If you can get past some technical glitches, awkward controls, and routine gameplay, Messiah will deliver — for a little while.

# 20

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■ PC

# Soldier of Fortune

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Raven

Not nearly as disturbing as the magazine it's named after



"Well, there goes the 'T' rating."



After this past winter's spate of multiplayer-driven first-person shooters, it's good to find developers once again returning to elements of strategy, no matter how sparse. *Soldier of Fortune* may not be

Shakespeare, but it's at least as captivating as any of the bad prose that has run in every issue of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. The game has plenty of enemies to shoot, an impressive armory to use, and gratuitous, splatterific visuals to look at.

Yes, SoF is extremely violent, although the final version isn't as violent as earlier builds. Yes, limbs can be hacked off and heads do explode, but the over-the-top layers of intestines and geyser of blood have been

tuned down just a tad. The weapons are realistic, often clearly modeled after real-world armaments, but players dish out far more hurt than they actually take — SoF is not Rainbow Six as much as it is *The Last Action Hero*.

Raven Software has proven itself to be better at creating games with id Software's technology than Carmack and crew could have hoped it to be. Although SoF is running the three-year-old Quake II engine at its core, Raven has made so many changes and improvements that the game bears little resemblance to id's last

shoot-'em-up. All new graphics technology, improved character models and animations, and better lighting and textures all add realism to SoF's gritty world.

While it's not the most original game, *Soldier of Fortune* delivers blood, action, and violence in sufficient quantities to keep action gamers glued to their chairs. The violence and gore naturally mean this isn't a game for kids, but more "mature" gamers with a hardened outlook shouldn't be bothered. Give Unreal Tournament a break and get back into some single-player carnage for a change. — Chris Kramer



■ Enemy reaction to damage is location specific and somewhat random, so there are no boring, repetitive deaths.

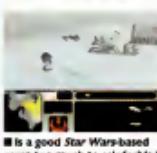
**NextGen ★★★★☆**

**Bottom Line:** Sure, it's not for kids, but it's as good an FPS as you could ever ask for. Go ahead, be antisocial for a while.

## Star Wars: Force Commander

■ Platform: PC

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: LucasArts



■ Is a good Star Wars-based game too much to ask for? Is it?

We really wanted to like *Force Commander*. Really. It's been so long since LucasArts has given us a good Star Wars game that we were sure that this was the one. It isn't. Originally slated for release in January 1999, *FoCom* was delayed by more than a year while the development team scrapped the engine and game that they had been working on in order to create a whole new game. Unfortunately, what they ended up with after starting from scratch is no better.

*FoCom* attempts to break from real-time strategy standards in two ways. One, instead of

mining or gathering resources, players accumulate Command Points by attacking the enemy or capturing supply bases. Second, these points can then be used to requisition units from orbiting spaceships. But these game mechanics, which are supposed to keep *FoCom* closer to the feel of the Star Wars universe, slow the game's pace to a crawl and render every engagement a war of attrition.

The graphics engine powering *FoCom* is dated. Even cranked up to the highest possible resolution at 32-bit color, the units are as blocky and low-detailed as the environments are bland, and the gameplay, which tries to be unique, falls flat. For a game that requires a 3D accelerator, it is missing many of the key ingredients we've come to expect from a hardcore game, like decent filtering or impressive lighting effects. — Chris Kramer

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** Another in a long string of Star Wars messes, *Force Commander* is not as bad as *Rebelion*, but isn't even as good as *Myth II* or *Warzone 2100*.

## Star Trek: Armada

■ Platform: PC

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Activision



■ So here you go: Star Trek, I; Star Wars, 9

With a super 3D game engine, the *Star Trek* license, and elements from RTS classics like *Warcraft* and *Age of Empires*, *Armada* is a bona fide hit.

You can control four of *Star Trek*'s most powerful races and organizations: The Federation, Romulans, Klingons, and the cyborgs Borg. Each race has its own ship designs, weapons, bases, defensive armaments, etc., and loatheous devices such as the Corbotine Reflector can be discovered through research. Despite the fact that the Borg

are generally believed to be the top dogs (at least theoretically) in the *Star Trek* universe, the game is well balanced, so there's no extreme advantage to be had by anyone.

Although a good deal of base building and resource collecting exists in *Armada*, frenzied 3D battles form the meat of play. Control is handled by simply pointing and clicking, and we give kudos to the Director's Cut Mode, in which battleships zip and spin across the screen, shooting photon torpedoes, phasers, disruptors, etc. It's gorgeous.

The single-player game suffers from lmp AI — enemies usually won't rebuild defenses — but a neat multiplayer mode steps up the challenge and lets would-be starship captains duke each other over the net or a LAN. — Greg Orlando

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** The prime directive compels you to buy this game, even if you think that bald-headed freak Jean-Luc Picard was the best *Enterprise* captain ever.

# →PC Finals

## Might and Magic VIII: Day of the Destroyer

■ Platform: PC  
■ Publisher: 3DO ■ Developer: New World Computing



■ The once proud Might and Magic series has finally devolved into a generic RPG

It feels as though we've played this game already. *Might of the Destroyer* is unoriginal and is lacking in so many areas that it barely treats water.

This game uses essentially the same graphics engine as 1997's *MMV*, which was outdated even back then. The sprites are blurry and smeared, the landscapes are repetitive,

and the level of detail is almost nil, even with a 3D card. Besides the barely passable graphics, the sound effects haven't changed since *MMV*, and interaction with NPCs boils down to each of them saying the same things over and over.

Of course, as with any RPG, if the story was great, we could forgive most of the rest. Sadly, the story in *MMVII* offers nothing new — if you aren't the medieval FedEx man (take item A to person B and I'll give you C), then you're the Orkin guy killing wave after wave of monsters while you make your character stronger. This isn't innovation; it's monotony, and it offers very little to compel you to continue. — Kevin Rice

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** This isn't the bottom of the barrel in RPG gaming, but you can see the bottom from here.

## Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed

■ Platform: PC  
■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: Electronic Arts



■ If you live or breathe Porsche, you'll love the latest *Need for Speed*; if you're just looking for a good racing game, there are plenty of others.

The fourth sequel to *Need For Speed* focuses exclusively on the Porsche. More of a simulator than an arcade racer, *Porsche Unleashed* puts you behind the wheel of almost any model in Porsche's 25-year history.

If you prefer down-and-dirty racing, you can hop into your favorite car, gun the engine, and race CPU or human opponents

on a slew of courses. However, if you defy the Porsche, you will enjoy the RPG-like mode in which you're given a set amount of cash to race, modify, purchase, and sell Porsche until you can afford the pinnacle, the new GTI.

Likewise, the dream cars the game is based on, the vehicles in *Porsche Unleashed* have very sensitive steering, so practice is required. The visuals are outstanding, with sharp buildings, boats, trees, and other roadside paraphernalia that look almost photorealistic.

On the other hand, these features are true of nearly all high-end racing games these days. About the only thing this offers that the others don't is the highly-comprehensive Porsche license. — Doug Truesman

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** Though there's nothing wrong with it, there's little to separate *Porsche Unleashed* from the rest of the current pack of competent PC racers.

## Thief II: The Metal Age

■ Platform: PC  
■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Looking Glass

Do yourself a favor, and steal this game



■ Improved AI makes the guards more of a challenge this time

→ The original *Thief* was a mixed bag (man) of innovative, "stealthy" gameplay and tedious zombie smashing. But *Thief II* builds on the strengths of the original while thankfully discarding the needless swordplay. The result is an interactive experience that is the first "pure" stealth shooter on the planet and one of the most absorbing games of its genre.

The story picks up with Garrett a year after the events in the original title. There is an intriguing plot involving a corrupt sheriff, missing citizens, and religious zealots bent on shaping the world with steam-powered contraptions. The tale is vividly told over 15 levels, with excellent voice acting and presentation. Once again, Garrett lets fly numerous (and very witty) wisecracks during the mission, and this helps to solidify one of the strongest characters in shooters, a genre remarkably devoid of personalities who aren't named Duke.

The game play has been consciously designed to emphasize planning and thoughtfulness; players who simply crash through the door first to come to will find their life ending.

painfully in a swarm of guards. Living from shadow to shadow is a surprisingly compelling experience, and getting the jump on an unwary guard can be just as exciting as any frag.

There are some new tools for cautious bingers in *Thief II*, including invisibility and slowfall potions, a nifty knockout gas arrow, and an invaluable scouting orb that will let Garrett get a view of the world from a distance. Unfortunately, like the original, the graphics in *Thief II* are not on par with those of the rest of the genre. Although it does feature 16-bit color character models with much higher

polygon counts, and wonderful textures, it simply can't compete against today's eye candy.

There are other minor complaints: the controls are soft at times; some of the in-game voices are amateurish; and, being the greedy types we are, we wanted more than 15 levels. But *Thief II* is so full of ingenious level design, eerie atmosphere, and absorbing gameplay that we barely noticed the imperfections.

In a genre that rewards shooting first and planning later, *Thief II* stands out as an excellent thinking man's shooter. — Jim Preston

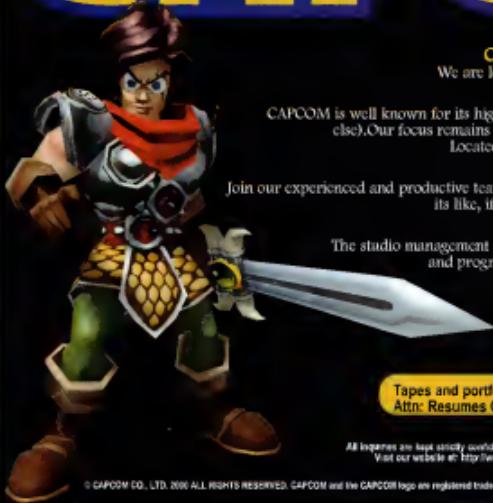


■ The Mechanics' "steampunk" technology makes life difficult for innocent thieves

## NextGen ★★★★☆

**Bottom Line:** Great, skulking gameplay, useful new tools, and clever level design make *Thief II* an excellent first-person "sneaker."

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# Letters

## Missives from NextGen's masses

→ I think you may have finally put to rest all the foolish letters about your being biased with the May (2000) issue. Right off the bat, you did stories of no less than a full page on all four major next-generation competitors. Major overseas PS2 coverage was an excellent lead, followed by the all-important announcement of the X-Box, some Dolphin news, and then a huge report on the Dreamcast. If

that isn't enough to shut your readers up, games for every platform managed to get great scores, highly unusual in any magazine. What's my point?

Every couple of months, some moron writes in to complain that you give special treatment to one system or show resentment to another. It's hard to believe that proving my point will change the attitude of anyone, especially new readers who won't see this, but I

think it's apparent that you guys are loyal to no one.

Did those people out there who pick on you for saying you're giving a certain system's games better scores ever think that the system just released some better games? Did those people who say you praise a new system too much ever stop to think that it's shaping up to be a nice piece of hardware? Probably not, and I think it's time you stop printing their letters.

JetNumber19@aol.com

Codemasters' choice of the Mike Tyson license. As a company based in the U.K., Codemasters probably wasn't aware of Mike's poor reputation in the U.S. We've been anticipating some backlash to this title, and in the future, we expect the folks at Codemasters will do a better job with market research.

→ This is in response to "The Broadband Question" on page 31 in NG 05/00. You were talking about the pros and cons of having a cable or DSL

connection to the Internet through game consoles rather than having a 56K connection. You had some very good points for both sides (broad- and narrowband connections), but there were some points that you missed. You stated that it would be very hard to play multiplayer games over the Internet with the amount of lag present with a 56K connection. Most computer gamers use 56K connections for multiplayer games over the Internet, and they don't seem to have as much of a burden as you implied. Second, not all people have access to cable or DSL connections. Finally, your article quotes AT&T as saying that it won't be until the year 2004 that they will have everyone wired for broadband connections. Four years is a long time to wait to play multiplayer games with your new PS2 or X-Box on the Internet. People want to bring the console home and be playing within 20 seconds with some guy in Tokyo. They're not going to want to wait around four years to play online. Basically, I think broadband is the next "new thing" and it's not ready for us yet.

Luke Hoersten  
LHi@Core.com

Um, pardon us, but did you actually read the article? At no point did we ever say "it would be very hard" to play over the Internet using Dreamcast's 56K modem.

## This one "blue" us away

I was reading the "Covert Ops: Nuclear Dawn" preview on page 62 of the May 2000 issue of *NextGen*, and I thought I'd try to shed some light on an issue that seemed to perplex the author. In the game, there's a train "inexplicably" named "Blue Harvest." The name Blue Harvest was actually used as a bogus title by Lucasfilm during the filming of *Return of the Jedi* to throw off rabid fans. For the filming of the movie, all of the scripts were titled "Blue Harvest."

"Blue Harvest" signs were posted around the perimeter of the set, and director Richard Marquand wore a "Blue Harvest" baseball cap. They even had a tag line: "Blue Harvest ... horror beyond imagination?" What the connection to the game is, I don't know. But that's most likely where the name came from.

Tom Sullivan  
DocNebula@aol.com

Thanks for your input. We're familiar with the story (as any self-respecting Star Wars fan would be), and we agree that the train's name is surely a reference to it. The point was, actually, why give that name to a train? Granted, Jedi was a top-secret project, and this is meant to be a stealthy, secret train, but we think it's a misplaced tribute. We love *Tolkien*, too, but we never once walked up to a microwave and said, "Good job on that popcorn. Henceforth, you shall be known as *The Lord of the Rings*." They aren't related, unless we've somehow missed a big train chase during every one of the six zillion times we've collectively watched the *Star Wars Trilogy*.



■ Code-naming *Return of the Jedi* as "Blue Harvest" might have worked better if they had used a different font.

Thank you. Someone finally got it! Seriously though, we've been taking those lumps since day one, and probably always will. It's an annoying part of the job, but we can handle it.

→ I understand that companies need to make money, and licensing a big-name celebrity may do that for them, but they also need to think about how the celebrity is perceived by the public. Why give Mike Tyson a game of his own? This makes Codemasters look like they really don't care about children or women, just profits. They're playing a man who teaches kids very, very poor sportsmanship, and is a convicted rapist and wife abuser. If certain political figures want to complain about what video-games teach children, then it's time for the National Organization of Women and Jesse Jackson to get on Codemasters about catering to this kind of celebrity. People only watch Mike Tyson's fights to see what stupid thing he will do next. My kids love fighting games, but know that they are fantasies, and that this is not the way real life is. Mike Tyson is a real person with a real attitude. Hey Codemasters, where are your O.J. Simpson football games, or *Place Your Bets* Baseball starring Pete Rose?

Randy  
crashgordon42@excite.com

You're not the only one who's somewhat puzzled by

(We did ask John Carmack the question, to which he replied Quake III played as well over the Internet on Dreamcast as it did with any other 56K connection.) In fact, the overall point of the article was exactly the opposite of what you seem to have read out of it: To wit, widespread availability of broadband connections is at least a few years off (read the sidebar on page 31), and Sega's strategy of starting a narrowband network so people can play games online now is a good one. And we never quoted AT&T, either; we quoted Sega's Charles Bellfield, who asserted that he had heard AT&T was going to have the San Francisco Bay Area (not "everyone") wired for broadband by 2004.

Go back and read it again. There will be a test on all this later.

→ I've noticed a very disturbing trend while surfing through one of the Bulletin Boards I'm a member of. I recently bought an import PS2, so naturally I joined a PS2 Bulletin Board. To my shock, this board was full of members who were mostly 12, 13, or so in age all talking trash about the Dreamcast. I believe the extent of the nontrash posts were to the effect of "PS2 is the best system."

I've made inquiries, but no one else seems to actually own a PS2 on this board. It seems to me that most of them have never played a Dreamcast, and/or have never even seen a PS2. Yet they are passing judgement as if they were the be-all and end-all authority of the subject.

Someone brought up the topic of the X-Box and how it might be more powerful than their beloved PS2, and this person got ridiculed because "Microsoft has no videogame experience."

Now, I'm all for being loyal to a company (my favorite system is still the PC-Engine ... or maybe the Neo Geo ... ah... can't decide...), but this is ridiculous. I'm not the staunchest follower of Sony (I didn't even really like the PSX), but at least I went out and bought a PS2 without passing judgement. It seems that the entire gaming community has caught Neo Geo fan syndrome (and anyone involved in that

scene knows just how bad that is). Can't we all just sit back and enjoy the games?

Hon Chung  
reality\_storm@hotmail.com

You sound as though you've been playing games for a long time, and you're only just now figuring out that certain sectors of the gaming audience have nothing better to do than go on bulletin boards and scream "SONY RULEZ"! The staffers at Next Gen have been covering games for a long time now (in one case, more than ten years) and not one of us can ever remember a time when it wasn't this way. Even in the days before the Internet, when all a hapless game journalist had to deal with was snail mail, anywhere from one-third to one-half of the letters would have been barely literate scrawls that read "Sega Sucks!" or something similar. And, sadly, a fair number of these 12- and 13-year-olds have a habit of actually being 20-something "adults."

Of course, videogame junkies aren't alone as far as talking trash goes – just hang out on a Porsche or Ferrari bulletin board if you don't believe it.

→ I have recently become enlightened in the world of LAN parties and wow! Have you done an article on LAN parties? Personally I think LAN parties are becoming an extremely popular form of PC gaming, especially with all the disparity on the net between connections and the ever-present lag monster.

Although I have attended only two LAN parties, I am extremely impressed with the whole thing ... so impressed that I've formed an online and LAN gaming team called team eXtreme. It's made up of ten guys who live near each other in the Fayetteville, NC, area. Most of us are in the military and stationed at Fort Bragg. I'm a Blackhawk Helicopter pilot, and in my spare time (seem to use all of it), I love to play on the net, and now at LAN parties. We're slowly working up sponsors so we can give prizes to people who attend LAN parties that we are part hosts to. Our website is

## Believe what you read in print

I wanna say, I love the magazine, and I'm highly anticipating the new Evil Dead game for PlayStation and Dreamcast. In the 04/00 Alpha, it was called Evil Dead: Hail to the King. Now, I'm looking over several gaming websites and I see it's called Evil Dead: Ashes 2 Ashes. What's up here? Is it one or the other?

riptide\_2000\_m@yahoo.com

Ashes 2 Ashes was an old working title that's long since been changed. When the game is actually released, it will, rest assured, be called Evil Dead: Hail to the King. When you work for a print magazine, you have to get this stuff right.

### ■ EVIL DEAD



■ Evil Dead: because the only other (as in!) in this game are the lead character's multiple personalities

<http://www.geocities.com/gordo28/2/index3.htm>

run your URL, though. Good luck.

→ We get together and play online a lot, and go to all the LAN parties around here and even do some traveling, but not too far. Our goal is to eventually be a huge force in the gaming industry and enlighten others in the awesome amount of fun that we have had. Go to the website and check us out if you have time. I thought perhaps you would be interested in doing an article on LAN gaming and parties.

Gordan "eXt Scythe"  
Cockream  
team eXtreme

Although we agree that LAN parties are great, we have no particular plans to give them any coverage, at least in the near future. We're happy to

→ Last summer I recall hearing about a classic videogame convention in Las Vegas. I was bummed that I missed it, but would like to attend to this year. Do you have any information on where I can find out when it is and how to register?

Matthew Bryant

Bryant@PostCommunications.com

Classic Gaming Expo 2000 is scheduled to take place at the Plaza Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas on July 29-30, 2000. It's a small show run by those in it for the love, not the money. Several Next Gen staffers went last year and had a blast, and intend to go again. More info is available at [www.cge2000.com](http://www.cge2000.com).



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Note: email is vastly, vastly preferred

# →Retroview

June 1984

Consoles crashed and burned, but the seeds of rebirth were sown in Japan

In 1984, it appeared that the console industry was all but dead. With the tremendous glut of low-quality games on the market, third-party developers saw their titles sell for literally fractions of their worth. Meanwhile, Atari, Coleco, and Mattel, the three strongest competitors in console hardware, were hemorrhaging money — Atari alone had lost \$336 million in fiscal 1983. Mattel and Warner Communications (Atari's parent company) sold off their console divisions, which effectively ended negotiations that would have given Atari the right to distribute Nintendo's Famicom system in the U.S. Both the new Atari and Coleco then shifted their manufacturing focus from consoles to PCs. Neither succeeded. Despite the disastrous state of the console industry, innovative titles continued to reap



Martial arts titles like *Karate Champ* were hits in the arcades and at home financial success in arcades. It was because of this success that Nintendo decided to release the Famicom in the U.S., without Atari. It debuted one year later as the Nintendo Entertainment System, and began guiding the home console back from the brink of extinction.

VIDEOGAMING FOR THE EIGHTIES!

→NextGen  
Next Generation Magazine

## The CRASH!

What is happening to the console industry?

**Atari:** Sold!  
**Intellivision:** Sold!  
**Vectrex:** Dead!  
**Coleco:** Now they're making dolls?



### PLUS!

Famicom: Atari passes on Nintendo's system. Will you reach the Stars?

Apple ■ Arcade ■ Atari ■ Commodore 64

### The Martial Arts Issue

*Karate Champ*  
*Kung-Fu Master*  
*Karateka*

## What we were playing

If we weren't on the Apple II, we were at the arcade

### CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



■ System: Apple II  
■ Publisher: Muse

### H.E.R.O.



■ System: Atari 2600  
■ Publisher: Activision

### PAPERBOY



■ System: Arcade  
■ Publisher: Alan

### PUNCH-OUT!



■ System: Arcade  
■ Publisher: Nintendo

### MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE



■ System: Apple II  
■ Publisher: Utopia Technologies

## Top Pop/Rock Singles of 1984

1 WHEN DOVES CRY - Prince and the Revolution

2 WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT - Tina Turner

3 SAY, SAY, SAY - Michael Jackson & Paul McCartney

4 FOOTLOOSE - Kenny Loggins

5 AGAINST ALL ODDS - Phil Collins

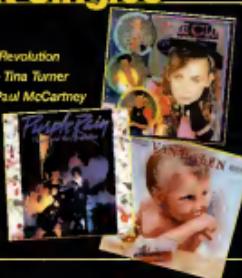
6 JUMP - Van Halen

7 HELLO - Lionel Richie

8 OWNER OF A LONELY HEART - Yes

9 GHOSTBUSTERS - Ray Parker, Jr.

10 KARMA CHAMELEON - Culture Club



## ...and in the real world

■ The Soviet Union boycotts the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, citing "unfriendly threats" against their athletes. insiders postulate they were just afraid to drive on the L.A. expressway.

■ Vanessa Williams becomes the first Miss America ever to resign the position after questionable photos of her surface in men's magazines. Oddly, she remains the only Miss America whose name anyone can remember.

■ William Gibson's *Neuroshima* is published, coining the term "cyberspace."

■ Red-hot pop star Michael Jackson burns out to be legitimately flammable when his hair catches fire during filming of a Pepsi commercial.

■ After a masterfully Orwellian commercial during the Super Bowl, Apple releases a new computer called the Macintosh. It is the first mass-market computer to feature a mouse.

■ James Fox, author of several books about the health benefits of running, dies of a heart attack while jogging.



# NOW IT'S ON THE NET UNLEASHING THE ULTIMATE HORROR: YOUR FELLOW AMERICANS.



Point of Origin

Eugene, Oregon

Screen Name, CapnCarnage

"I stuck a cat in your rocket, you backass Tuscaloosa cracker. He's in there chewing your mice. But you probably eat mice yourself when you run out of possum, you monster truck-loving, buck-toothed hillbilly. And you other two mentally challenged dopes, hang up. I won."

Player (1/2)

Time Remaining 00:00:00

Total Mice On Board 779



## ChuChu Rocket!



Point of Origin

Golden Palms Rest Community, Tempe Arizona

Screen Name Peaches

I'm nude

Player (1/2)

Time Remaining 00:00:00

Total Mice On Board 329



01



02



03



04



Point of Origin

Pittenweem, Vermont

## Screen Name: JuliusSqueezed

"CapnCarnage? What are you caption of? The Oregon Survivalist Granola Mutha? Maybe you should stop mocking pine trees and focus on the cat in your blue rocket—oh, holy crap, I'm the blue rocket!"

Player Info

Time Remaining: 0:00

Total Miss On Board: 0(+0)



Point of Origin

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

## Screen Name: WhiteLightning

"Shut up, CapnCarnage, you don't know butt-didly do! I don't love monster trucks I am not dumb! I had to go to the crapper is how the cat get in! I am smart, I went to State For two years. So you can just kiss my chu chu."

Player Info

Time Remaining: 00:30:00

Total Miss On Board: 0(+0)



scale-(1-30) TOP MODE

-50.011 -45.000 ChuChu Rocket

For the first time ever Team Sonic presents your chance to go online and face wacko opponents from all across this great nation. Lead stampeding rodents into your rocket in a race against time while you sick vicious kitties on rival ships through more than 75 massive levels and five different modes.

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It's everything  
you FEARED.



And more.

Now the most chilling game series of all time awaits you on Sega Dreamcast. Resident Evil: Code Veronica delivers a terrifying new chapter in survival horror. Frighteningly realistic. Graphically astonishing. Relentless. Terrifying. It's two disks of 100% pure fear. And it's all so real - you'll start sleeping with the lights on.

## RESIDENT EVIL CODE:Veronica™



Sega Dreamcast



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